

## ALL I EVER WANTED Part 2

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Summary: This is the rest of Mccull's story All I Ever Wanted which was never uploaded to FF. I do not own this story in any way I am just uploading the chapters that were only on DeviantArt. If you want to review do it on the original.

### 1. Chapter 20

~Ruby~

"Wally? Hey. Wally!"

Of all the stupid times to pass out. I was beginning to think it was always at the worst possible moment. Between the muck and confliction that was today I had somehow lost all sense of my dignity to compassion. I was chased out of town, degraded in front of the whole world, beaten to death by my mother's tongue, and then just when I think things are starting to turn around Wally goes and passes out on me.

"Wake up you!" I hissed shaking his shoulders slightly. I had just brought him over to the couch and flopped him down onto it. He was still breathing, so I wasn't too worried, and I noticed his hands twitching so I didn't think he was that far gone.

Lightening cracked in the window, revealing a flash of light across his stoic face. I couldn't see his skin tone past the scarlet that covered his face, but I did see past the worry. His eye lids were half closed, and the pale blue of his iris lolled drowsily.

"Heyâ€¦" I ran my hand through his hair once.

"Whaâ€¦"what? Didâ€¦"Iâ€¦"

"Passed out." I informed as he came through, stiff and groaning to himself. "Whyâ€¦"why does my headâ€¦" he flinched away from a small

knot appearing behind his ear. "Owâ€| "

"You hit your head." I picked myself up off the floor beside him and sit on the edge of the couch.

"Y-you didn't catch me?" he asked in disbelief, rubbing the bump carefully. "That wasn't niceâ€| "

I smiled sheepishly. "It wasn't like I didn't try. You just kind of slithered to the floor though... the windowsill was in the way."

Wally shook his head and rubbed his temple for a moment, scrunching up his face in distaste. "You can't do that to me."

"What?"

"That. What you did before." The pout in his voice made my heart flutter. Somehow I found the enjoyment in his timid nature today. Maybe it was because I was so unstable after everything I had been through. Maybe it was because I was just too damn happy to be out of sight from cameras. If I was being honest with myself I knew I wasn't exactly sure what it was, I just knew that I was pleasantly surprised by Wally. And hellâ€|

He looked good in my shirt.

"Dancing?" I suggested lamely, trying to avoidâ€"or postponeâ€"the topic of our kiss. I felt too much like Sapphire at the moment, and hoped Wally hadn't passed out because of that. What if I really was a horrible kisser? What if Wally thought I was trying to suck his face inside out?

>"Yeah that" Wally lied casually. We both knew it wasn't true.<p>

I looked away awkwardly, twiddling my thumbs in my hands. "Wellâ€| then I guess weâ€| shouldn't, you knowâ€| danceâ€| anymore."

"What? No!" Wally sat up straighter and scooted closer to me. "Iâ€"I didn't mean it. Iâ€"I mean I did, but not really. It just takes time for me to get used to stuff like that. You knowâ€| dancing."

I couldn't help but laugh. "What happens if you pass out again?"

He sighed, hanging his head dramatically, muttering something about "who cares?" before turning his face back up to me. His eyes reflected the look of a begging growlithe, but he didn't argue. We both knew that this wasn't healthy for himâ€"how could it be? So in a senseâ€| how could we be together?

I flinched at the thought. Did I really want to be together like that with Wally? I wasn't sureâ€"no clear thoughts had entered my brain todayâ€"but I figured this couldn't hurt. I wasn't dating Sapphire, so there was no cheating involved, and I wasn't bound by anything elseâ€"like contracts from a production studio. The only people in this were me and Wally, so I wasn't worried about anyone getting hurt.

"Wellâ€| I uhâ€|" Wally broke the silence. "I likeâ€|dancingâ€| with you."

Did he really mean dancing? I couldn't be sure. "Iâ€"I did too." I murmured. If we were talking about what I thought we were talking aboutâ€| then I did indeed enjoy "dancing" with him. "But not making you pass out."

"I didn't like that either."

"Yeahâ€|. Noâ€|"

"Nope. Wasn't fun."

I groaned internally. What had I done? Making things so horribly awkward between us? I wanted to pull my hair out with frustration. Maybe I shouldn't have done it at all...

"Ruby." Wally mumbled again, to break the silence with his small voice.

"What?"

"Caâ€"can youâ€| dance with meâ€| one more time?" He hid his face by looking down at his lap. His hands were stationed there, limp but shaking nervously.

Did he mean dance as in dance? Or dance as inâ€|

"Why don't youâ€| dance with me." I suggested hesitantly.

A small laughâ€" barely a giggleâ€"escaped his mouth, and his eyes were too unbearably sheepish not to meet. "It takes two to tango."

I glared halfheartedly at him. "What if you pass out again?"

His thin lips turned up in the most chaste of ways and I could see his slightly too big front teethâ€"though they didn't bother me like they once did. I actually quite liked them AND the small gap between them. "Catch me this time." He whispered, shifting up onto his knees and leaning closer to me.

Fighting my own shrewd amusement I wrapped my arms around him and waited for him to mend his shape to mine. Hands instantly went to my hair and tugged softly, pulling my face forward hastily. I could tell his breath was already short with anticipation, so I had to hold myself back from the desire to flick and suck on his lower lip like I wanted to. It was merely a peck, but it was enough. He melted into my lap, hanging his head on my chest and sighing.

I wasn't sure how long we sat like that or how many times lightning flashed in the window across from us, but I did notice at one point the soft and indulgent breathing that came. Silence was all that we needed right now, so it wasn't hard to pinpoint when exactly his lungs seemed to clear. I listened carefully in amazement, tilting my head down and drowning in the smell of him.

His feathery hair seemed to reflect the sound he was making; airy and floating, almost like a silent whistle. Now that I thought about it, everything about Wally had the same gentle atmosphere. I pictured everything about his appearance hogging the lack of air in his lungs, and only giving it back in such moments like this. I smiled slightly.

Wally sounded healthy. For once in his life he wasn't feeling the irritation of not getting enough air. And for the first time since I had met him I wasn't worried about the potential danger that it could cause.

Was he always like this when he slept? Maybe I had just always been too far away to notice. My hand played in the locks of his green cider colored hair, while my other one curled up under his backside so that I could hold him steady. He moaned ever so softly under his breath as I moved us together down on the large leather couch in my upstairs living room. I twisted to face him, tucked his head into my chest, and smothered his slender body between me and the pillows with a yawn.

Through the heat and the tension of the day I couldn't picture a more perfect ending. It was strange how quickly things could change if given the chance; I was feeling the full effect of that now. A million years awayâ€”this morningâ€”I had said something to Wallyâ€”and I vaguely remembered how insensitive it had been.

I don't love anyone.

Who was I to say that? Howâ€”how ignorant of me. If I didn't know what love was to begin with, how could I sit there and say I didn't love anyone at all? I very well could love someone and just not know it.

Thunder cracked against the window with a flash, making me jump slightly. My thoughts scattered skittishly, retreating to the back of my brain for another night. I yawned once again, fighting the sudden numbing of exhaustion.

I glanced down at Wally once again, tightening my arms around him until we couldn't get much closer. Gently I pecked him on the forehead.

"Maybe I do love youâ€”"

â€”

We were awakened by an unfeasible, wailing, howl of a noise as every main room in the house squealed over the intercom system. It was a noise I was certainly familiar with, but like the chanting of my name, I hated it. My head stirred with nostalgia, and my half asses dreams turned into pictures of mailmen delivering packages, my managers coming to demand why I took a sick day, endless fans discovering this to be my address. I groaned, aggravated by the rude chime.

I moved to turn over, disturbed and expecting to push my face into my pillows to drown out the forever noise, but finding that there was nothing to hide in. I squirmed, gripping the soft familiar material of a lazy day t-shirt and forcing my eyes open.

Wally was looking up at me, wide eyed in surprise at the noise, but even more so at the fact that I was lying on top of himâ€”smothering him in fact. He seemed lost in the last drowsy hours we spent together, thinking back to last night, probably wondering if it was a dream.

The vicious alarm sounded again, signaling that someone was out in the building hallway, having just left out elevator on our floor. I sighed heavily and pushed myself up, feeling all the crooks and kinks in my back from sleeping in the same position all night.

Wasn't my mother home to get the damn door? I thought angrily to myself, ignoring Wally's muted question and heading for the staircase to the second floor. I started shuffling down them slowly.

"Ruby?" Wally called again, his feet thudding softly behind mine as I entered the hall below and reached for my bedroom doorknob. No right in answering the door in boxers, I didn't want to scareâ€”or amuseâ€”anyone. I wasn't worried about them leaving either, seeing as though they rang the alarm once again.

"In here." I called to Wally, blushing as he followed me. He was wearing my shirt already, so I figured might as well give him the whole outfit. I dug through the enormous pine dresserâ€”full of lazy clothes onlyâ€”and pulled out two pairs of pajama pants.

"Put those on." I tossed the slightly smaller pair at Wally before standing and reaching for my hat. I had left it on the dresser last night before going up to the loft where Wally was staying.

"What kind of alarm is that?" He followed me, tightening the strings on the pants until they were snug around his small waist.

"An annoying one." I grumbled, rolling my shoulders back and shaking out the grogginess. I half walked-half dragged myself into the pajama pants before throwing my hat over my head and hiding the mess that was my bed head hair.

"Who do you think it is?" Wally mused, following as I stumbled along the next flight of stairs down to the largest floor of the penthouse.

"I don't know." I shook my head as I crossed the large room, passing the kitchen and the enormous pool table my mother insisted on having for entertainingâ€”more like an extra table to have people sit on during her passion parties. I flinched at the thought.

Wally hung back by the staircase, timid with the idea of a stranger seeing himâ€”I didn't know why, he never seemed to care before. I put my hand on the door knob and punched in a quick security code before twisting it open.

"Can I help you?" I said mechanically before I realized just who was standing on my doorstep. "Ohâ€”Heyâ€”Sapphire?" It was meant to sound somewhat friendly, but came out in confusion as I saw her deepening glossy eyes and damp face.

"OH- Ruby." She blinked in surprise for a second at seeing me here, but was fighting too many tears to let it distract her.

"Sapphireâ€”whatâ€”what happened?" I asked, stunned as she pushed my door open wider and forced herself into my home. At one point in time she practically lived here herself, so I saw no harm in this, of course with Wally hovering around the corner I was stiff as a

board.

"Theâ€"They fired me." She clutched at my shirt in desperation.  
"Rubyâ€" everything is ruined."

"Butâ€" why?" I pulled back slightly so that she would look at me, rather than hug me. Something about it felt wrong for once. I was actually a little upset that she thought I would be her shoulder to cry on after how she treated meâ€"granted I treated her pretty shitty tooâ€"but still.

"Beâ€"Because!" she yanked herself away and wiped at her tears, anger flickering between the pain. "It's your faultâ€"!"

I suppressed a sigh. Not this again.

"But Brendan made it worseâ€" When that overgrown fl-fluff ball decided to destroy main street!" she let her shoulders fall forward, limp with the agony of knowing that her future had been shattered in someone else's hands. "Theâ€"They said that he was firedâ€"buâ€"but thenâ€"

She stood, holding herself together in the only way she knew howâ€"with anger. Her face was aflame with anger as she shoved me. "You did this!" she let her fists fall against my chest for a mere second while I stood, dumbfounded by her bipolar emotions. How do you treat someone like that?

I was too stubborn to apologize for leaving, but I was too nice to tell her to get over it and move on. Any other television company would take her in a heartbeat. Lesser studios have been snapping at our feet for a measly taste of the fame for years. Honestly I didn't see what she was so worried about. With any luck she could try out something new and then our studio would come crawling back anyways.

"Ruâ€"Rubyâ€" pleaseâ€"pleaseâ€"!" She slithered down in front of me, tugging at my clothes along the way until she was gripping my pant legs in despair. Dramatic much? Arceus why? Why of all thingsâ€"!

>"Please! Yoâ€"you have to heâ€"help me"<p>

"How?" I asked in disbelief, head swiveling around to look at the staircase. Wally was no longer standing there, which lead me to believe he went upstairs in his own frustration. Way to go, I wanted to yell up to him. Leave me to fend alone.

Sapphire whimpered and sobbed at my feet, shaking with panic.  
"Johtoâ€"Theâ€"there's a studio there."

I thought back, far beneath the surface of my most recent nightmares to a day in time where my mother dragged me to Johto to do a photo shoot for some random magazine about kids in performing. I had been a lousy, awkward preteen at the time, but the pictures had been so popular I actually started to believe otherwise. I flinched at the thought.

"What about it?"

"Theâ€"they will give mâ€"meâ€" a break. Mâ€"my big break." Her ocean

blue eyes turned up to meet mine then, and rimmed in red I couldn't see the once independent, strong, fearless girl that was my childhood best friend. All I saw was confliction and pain. My heart went out to her, really it did, but the next words out of her mouth completely turned me off.

"Iâ€"I need you though." She grew unbearably quiet, sitting back on her knees and taking terribly stiff breaths. She looked like misery at its finest, and I didn't know what to do. "It's a package deal." She looked away, hiding her desperation from me. "Theâ€"they want you toâ€"too."

"What?!" I jumped back in surprise, stepping onto the thick plushy rug that lined our living room. I bumped into a long side table, making a ridiculously expensive lamp wobble to and fro.

"Yeaâ€"yeah." She put her head in her hands and bawled, making noises you would think to hear only in the kinds of acts she puts on. I grit my teeth awkwardly.

"Sapphireâ€" I hated seeing her like this, but in the back of my mind I was thinking about all the hell she would put me through to make her dream come true. She deserved a big break, someone to love her for her and not for being a side dish to me, but I knew that wasn't going to happen. If the Johto production company wanted us both, all that meant was that they really didn't want her, but weren't about to take me and leave her.

"Theâ€"they're offering aâ€"a lot of money." She whispered, knowing that didn't make a difference to me. I had made my opinion of the filth perfectly clear time and time again. People didn't need money to be happyâ€"I actually envied those who didn't have it. Like Wally's small family, who had worked shamelessly their whole lives to have the things they did. It was in my opinion that those peopleâ€"including meâ€"who had everything handed to them in their lives, never knew what it meant to appreciate something. It was a huge part of why I wanted to leave in the first place.

I shook my head at Sapphire, who had once laid her ocean eyes on a twenty dollar bill handed to her at the age of three. I was four at the timeâ€"almost fiveâ€"so I remembered the pure lust in her eyes, though she claimed I exaggerated it. She had fallen into a deep trap lined with riches, and never came out. To her more money was better; to me it was worse.

"Iâ€"I know that you doâ€"don't careâ€" about that." She tried to steady herself with a breath. "Butâ€" thisâ€"this is my only chanceâ€"I need your help."

"Sapphireâ€" Iâ€"No."

"Please!" pulled herself together with that anger again, forcing herself up and staggering towards me, hands outstretched. "Iâ€"I'm sorry! Aboutâ€"everything."

"That's not the point." I insisted. "Sapphire Iâ€"I can't."

"OH you can."

The both of us turned, having been so lost in the moment not to have noticed my mother was storming forwardâ€”probably having listened this whole timeâ€”to meet us in the living room. She was wearing her work clothes, though I was under the impression she didn't have a job anymore because she quit. Her hair was still damp so I knew she must have been in the shower when Sapphire came to the door, and I couldn't help but groan. Mentally I was cursing up a storm in my head.

"You can, and you will." My mother pointed a sharp finger at me. Once upon a time it would have daunted me into cowering, but now it just angered me.

"No." I barked stubbornly. If there was anything me and my mother had in common it was our thick heads.

"So help me Arceus, Ruby you will!" She threatened. "I will ship you to Johto myself. You aren't eighteen yet, I still sign your papers remember?"

"That's child abuse!" I argued. "You can't do this to me! Why don't you care about how I feel for once!?"

"What about how Sapphire feels?" My mother moved, in all her snarky grace, to put the length of her arm around my childhood best friend. I glared as she spoke to the girl. "Don't worry honey; you will get your break."

Sapphire didn't reply, but looked up at me in the same black misery, eyes suffocating in some guilty emotion. For the first time I realized that Sapphire was the second most selfish person I knew; second only to my mother of course. My heart crackled with hatred. My mother had driven me to run away in the past, and I was remembering all the painful reasons why again now.

"I'll leave again." I enquired, folding my arms and leaning against the short table. I wanted to feel bold, but on the inside I was shrinking, trying to block out the old forgotten fear of my mother's wrath.

"You will do no such thing!" as if to block any attempt to leave she shuffled her way in front of the door. I would say I wasn't one for dramatic exitsâ€”but that would be a lie. Even so, my mother should have realized I wouldn't leave right then and there without my pokemon or Wally.

"Sapphire, honey do you have a contract?"

I wanted to throw something at the word. Contract. Such a dirty wordâ€”signing your rights away to people who didn't care about you. That's what it was. It was a one sided agreement that no one kept up to. There was no fairness, no compromise, not even the open agreement for debate if needed.

Sapphire looked up at me, meeting my eyes and deepening the gaze until I could see all her hopes and dreams. She was selfish, perhaps even more selfish than I was once. And no matter how much I wanted to believe that it wasn't my fault, her selfishness somehow turned into guilt and strewn across my face. Sure, had I not run away in the first place she would still have a job, but it would be with Brendan,



and she wasn't happy with that either.

Sapphire was unappeasable, and would never be happy with what she had. She would always want more. More. More. More. Didn't anyone see the real value of things around them? People? Health? Arceus forbid my mother or Sapphire spend even a day in Wally's shoesâ€¦ they would learn real quick just how fragile the good things in life are. Money couldn't buy a cure for chronic nosebleeds or asthma so bad it could strangle you in a heartbeat. Maybe if they understood that they would understand my desire to have not more, but LESS.

"It's on the computerâ€¦" Sapphire whispered, still staring into my soul as if she was a zombie and wanted to eat my flesh.

"Come on honey." My mother said. "We will get you signed up right away. Ruby too." Her eyes flickered to me. I hated the way she coddled Sapphire, as if she was her daughter and I was just some random kid. Just because she was living the life my mother wantedâ€¦

I glared back, fighting a flood of emotions I couldn't even understand. Hadn't she broken me enough yesterday? Did my mother insist on making me crumble again...

"I'll leave! I swear I will! And I won't come back either!" I clenched my hands into fists and watched them walk away to the computer room attached to my mother's bedroom.

"The hell you won't Ruby." My mother said squalidly, turning her back on me; her own son. "You owe Sapphire this for ruining her career."

I flinched. I didn't ruin her career, Brendan did.

"Besides." My mother said again. "As soon as I confirm this contract you belong to them. And they won't tolerate you running away like I did. You want to be in some deep trouble boy, you go ahead and run."

"They won't find me." I hissed. "No one will." I'd go across the world to Unova if I had to.

My mother shook her head at me and sighedâ€"not sadlyâ€"but evilly. She stopped in the doorway of the room, hand around Sapphire so she couldn't look at me and change her mind. "Go ahead. Run away then Ruby." She growled, glaring heartlessly at me.

I thought by this point I would have been prepared for anything. I had suffered rejection, loss, injury, worry, everything imaginableâ€"or so I thought. But what I was not prepared for were the words that came out of my mother's mouth next. They left me wounded and wilting, springing tears to my eyes. My own mother cut a gash so deep into my heart I knew it would never be healed. It was obvious she no longer believed in me, she no longer supported me (if she ever did), and she no longer looked in my direction.

"Run away, Ruby." She spat bitterly. "It's the only thing you do right anyways."

## 2. Chapter 21

~Wally~

In all my wildest dreams I never, not once, thought a mother's family could be so cruel. And as I stood watching from behind the staircase, hands shaking with the sudden intense desire to hit something, I learned more about Ruby than I did in the time span of the weeks I had known him.

He was strong on the outside, fragile on the inside. Everything about him seemed to crumble in this Arceus forsaken city and I couldn't imagine what that felt like. When I was home in Verdanturf I was my strongest, surrounded by the people who cared about me most. That was what made it my home to begin with. That was supposed to be the building blocks of anyone's home, and yet Ruby had been living in nothing more than a house his whole life. Not a home, but a house lacking love and stability.

I felt absolutely wretched, wanting to spit on the shined shoes of these hoity-toity people. Since when was human nature so ravenous that you are willing to ruin your kids life? My mind kept reverting back to this anger while I was personally trying to listen to the conversation and piece together the horror of what was going to happen next.

"It's on the computer!" Sapphire's petrified voice rattled my hate for her. A computer document? Something to email or something to print out? I glanced at Ruby's horror, his empty promise of running away, and then something jolted me back to reality.

I could stop this. Or at least postpone it.

With a jolt I whirled and flew as quietly as I could back up the stairs to the second floor of the penthouse. I through open the door of Ruby's bedroom and looked around for my backpack. My Kecleon, that's who I needed.

The worn out black sack was pressed up against the wall next to the door, unzipped and stuffed with things I wasn't sure why I had brought in the first place. I dug through it quickly and found the pokeball I was looking for before whirling and racing down the steps again. My feet sounded heavier on the way down, and I could only hope that they wouldn't notice.

I stopped at the second to last step, peering around the wall to see Ruby standing rigid, hands gripping the wood of some expensive table. My heart broke for him, and I couldn't imagine how he was feeling. The look on his face! what had they said to him? I swore to myself that if Sapphire did it I would personally dispose of her. Too bad I was raised to have more respect for those older than me.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw his mother and the girl walking away. My shoulders rolled forward and I dropped my pokeball quickly, leaning around the corner to see more clearly.

"Kekeke!" the second pokemon I ever raised made a happy chucking noise. I shoved my hand in front of his mouth quickly and held him tightly to my chest.

"I know, I know." I whispered. "I missed you too. But you have a job to do. Listen." I set him down and peered around the corner. Ruby was still standing, paralyzed with whatever was said. "Kecleonâ€¦ see that room over there? I need you to go sneak in there. Do not get caught!" I hissed severely. "But you have to unplug the computer in there ok?"

>"Kekek!" he laughed under his breath, happy to have mischief to cause. I rolled my eyes, knowing any other situation I would have frowned upon his behavior.<p>

"Don't just unplug it thoughâ€¦ you knowâ€¦ rip the chords or something." I gave him a gentle shove into the open space of the living room, gesturing for him to go. He cast a glance back at me before disappearing into the open space of the room. I watched his jagged stripe teeter across the floor, barely noticeable as he wove between table legs and stayed out of Ruby's sight.

"Hurryâ€¦" I whispered under my breath before standing up and gathering myself. Anger, hate, sadness, I willed it all away and shoved the pokeball back into my pocket before stepping out into the living room.

Ruby didn't seem to notice me as I approached him; he was caught in a staring contest with the floor, only he was losing. I had barely seen Ruby cry the other day, but those had been angry tears, a need to let off steam and no other way to do it. I would have rather seen that a hundred times over again before seeing him like this even once.

"Rubyâ€¦" I whispered, reaching out to touch his hand gently. "Iâ€¦I'm so sorry." I had to resist the urge to cry as well. It felt like another illness to me, when someone's sadness was so contagious. This wouldn't be the first time I had to stop myself from relenting in someone else's tears.

He's burgundy eyes turned over to me then, and I saw something flash between them. Understanding? No. Maybe relief? Either way I knew he was much too fragile to stand there and cry on my shoulder with an audience. Without giving it much thought I was ushering him toward the stair case, trying to comfort him in any way that I could.

He didn't speak, or keep pace with me while we took the stairs. He kept stopping and looking back, perhaps wondering if he should go back down and make amends. I would stop him if he tried.

"Rubyâ€¦" I said his name gently as we finally reached the second floor and shuffled into his bedroom. He pulled away from me with a grunt and scrubbed an arm over the back of his face, trying to push the tears away. I knew the feeling at one point. It was embarrassing to be a guy crying, but at some point you have to admit defeat. I remembered vaguely the day I "broke" when I was younger. I had spent more time trying not to cry over the inevitable when I found how just how sick I wasâ€¦and always would beâ€¦that it was actually making me worse.

"She hates me." Ruby finally spoke, after I shut the door behind us and came to his side.

I wanted to reassure him that his mother loved him and that it was a misunderstanding, but I knew otherwise. No one could be so heartless

unless they didn't care. Sad as it was, I couldn't bring myself to argue with him. He shrunk to the floor leaning against the wood of his bed frame and covering his face in his hands.

"You poor thingâ€|" I huffed under my breath, hating seeing him like this. Crouching at his side came in a blur, and before I knew it I was pulling him into me, wrapping my slender arms around his body and pressing my face against his. "It's going to be ok."

He shook his head. "They're going to make me performâ€|Iâ€|"I can't do it."

"We'll leave." I insisted, stroking his hair beneath his hat.. "You can stay with me in Verdanturf. My Auntie and Uncle will welcome you."

He just shook his head, leaning into me and taking deep breathes.

"Ruby." I showered his head in kisses, trying to make him feel better in any way I could. "I sent my Kecleon to ruin the computer. Your mother will have to go somewhere else to send itâ€| which means this gives us time to think of a plan."

That got his attention. His face came up and he pulled away wide eyed with shallow hope. "Youâ€|youâ€|"

I nodded at him. "Yeahâ€| and Iâ€|"I can think of something." My mind stirred in confusion as I thought back to what Sapphire had initially said. The production company in Johto wanted Ruby and her as a package deal. If we could convince Sapphire not to take the offer then Ruby wouldn't have to either.

"You sneaky bastard." Ruby laughed halfheartedly at me in the most loving way possible. Trying to wipe away his tears he hugged me. "I never saw it coming."

I kissed him on the cheek again. "What if we can change Sapphire's mind about going?" I suggested.

The lightness faded as quickly as it had come. Ruby shook his head. "She's desperate. So she won't listen to reason eitherâ€|"

I had to admit I was expecting as much, and the idea of trying to persuade that rotten girl of anything turned me off. I racked my brain for anything else.

"We could convince the production company to just take Sapphire?" I mused.

"We only have as long as it takes for my mother to send that email."

"Then we convince your mother not to email them at all." I was very confident in my persuasive skills, and didn't doubt that with a little luck I couldn't change someone's mind. Not to mention anger was on my side. The very idea of Ruby leaving me to go to something he hatedâ€| I was fighting not to dig my nails into his back because of the hate.

"Yeah, you do that." Ruby snorted sarcastically.

"Alright. I knowâ€¦ it won't workâ€¦ butâ€¦" There had to be something I could use to my advantage. But what would a tag along like me have to prove that Ruby himself didn't?

"What ifâ€¦" I gathered, head fuming with terrible ideas until something seemed to be dragged to the surface. "What if weâ€¦"noâ€¦"What if I could convince Sapphire that she should bring the contract in person?"

"What's that have to do with me?"

"Wellâ€¦ if Sapphire thinks that her chances of getting hired are stronger if it happens in personâ€¦ then she will want you to sign in person as well."

"But she knows I won't."

"Stop being so negative." I scolded gently. "Your mother is "making" you remember?"

He looked up at me in confusion. "I don't get it."

I took him by the shoulders tightly. "Listen. If I can convince Sapphire that it's more beneficial for her to sign papers in person than have your mom email themâ€¦ then she will convince her otherwise. And your mom will have no choice but to agree."

"So then what? Either way they will still sign papers!"

"But it gives us more time to think of something betterâ€¦ Even if you have to get on a plane and fly to Johto with Sapphireâ€¦ Thenâ€¦"then you can talk to the production company in person. Maybe you can make them reconsider taking Sapphire but not you."  
>"And my mother?"<p>

I groaned. So many loopholes! "She won't be there."

"You're not making any sense."

"No you justâ€¦"you can't see it like I do. I'm no good at explaining." I shook my head. "Your mom will have to miss the plane."

"Wallyâ€¦" Sheer disappointment shone on his face. I knew I sounded like I was on drugsâ€¦and hell I was, medication remember?â€¦but I knew that I could make it work. Somehowâ€¦

"I promise." I assured.

Ruby shook his head. "And what do I do?"

"Just act like yourself. Be mad and upset. If you weren't then they would know something was wrong." I insisted. "Let me do all the work."

"And how? How do YOU plan on making this work?"

"They don't know me."

"They know you're on my side."

I shook my head. "But they don't know why I'm on your side. So I can make them believe that I want you to perform too."

"Your bat shit crazy"

"No! I justâ€”I know I can help youâ€”I will try to help you any way I can."

"Bat. Shit. Crazy." He repeated dramatically, making me roll my eyes. Didn't he get it? Or did he really think that I couldn't do it because I couldn't do it?

"I love you."

"What?"

"I'm bat shit crazy because I love you." I leaned in and pecked him on the lips so swiftly I was sure he wouldn't feel it. And even that alone made my heart flutter and my lungs gasp. A tingling sensation went through me and I shoved up off the ground away from him. He was left stunned, looking back at me as if I had just slapped him across the face.

"Nowâ€”I have to find Kecleonâ€”" I blushed furiously. It didn't feel like this was the first time I told Ruby I loved him, but it indeed was.

"Wallyâ€”" Ruby spluttered awkwardly. "Iâ€”Iâ€”"

My heart lurched. Love me too? I know you doâ€”

"Thank youâ€”" he sighed, making me roll eyes as he shrank back into himself, humiliated. How typical. I never understood why it was so hard to show people how you felt. Ruby was a prime example of what I didn't understand.

"Jerk." I muttered lovingly as I left the room, trying to convince myself that in time he would say it back.

â€”.

If there was anything in this world that I learned from Ruby, it was that acting wasn't everything. He absolutely hated it, I understood that, but in a situation like this was by all means practical.

I was a horrible liar, and probably a horribly actor as well, but no one fit the part better than I could, so of course it was believable. Maybe my rapid heartbeat would be part of the act as wellâ€”I had never been so nervous beforeâ€”except every time Ruby kissed me- but as I recited the things I could say in my head, I began to realize just how obvious this whole thing could be.

I stopped around the corner to Ruby's mother's room, taking a deep breath and listening carefully to what they were saying.

"I'll have to call an exterminator." The woman was saying in her sharp voice. "No ratatta is going to chew through my electrical cords

and get away with it."

"Let's just go to the library down the streetâ€¦ They have a computer we can send it from." Sapphire suggested, which made my heart lurch. I had to act fast.

With a jolt I turned the corner and put on a mock excited face. "Yâ€¦you are sending Ruby to Johto?!"

Sapphire looked over first, while his mother was still fuming over her ripped computer cords. Kecleon had done a brilliant job destroying the thing and preventing it from ever working again. I sent him up to Ruby with promise of a treat later.

"Whah? You!" Sapphire gasped in shock. "What are you doing here?"

Wally's mother came up then, standing and taking a glance in my direction. The look on her face proved that she had forgotten all about me staying here with her son for the night. I couldn't control the fact that my fake happiness vanished almost instantly. My family would never be so inconsiderate to a guest.

"Wallyâ€¦ pleaseâ€¦ This doesn't concern you." His mother hissed as nicely as she could.

"Noâ€¦no!" I insisted. "You don't understand. I WANT Ruby to perform too!"

A lie had never felt even remotely right before my tongue, and this one was no exception. The severity of such words made me feel like I would cave in and just end up begging to these two ignorant women. I love him! Don't take him away from me! I forced the words back down my throat and spoke as confidently as I could.

"Iâ€¦I'm his biggest fanâ€¦!"

Thought this wasn't exactly a lie, it wasn't the truth either. I was Ruby's biggest fan when it came to who he was as a person, but when it came to the performing I wanted about as much to do with it as he did.

The two just stared at me in confusion. Neither of them could disagree, after all, why else would I be following Ruby around everywhere? His mother looked rather convincedâ€¦and annoyed- but Sapphire held her gaze.

"You didn't even know him until he saved your life." She crossed her arms after a few seconds of silence.

"You're wrong." I shook my head. "Why do you think I passed out to begin with?" again, this wasn't exactly a lie. Ruby had made me pass out, but I hadn't known he was famous at the time.

"What exactly is it that you want, Wally?" His mother asked me, crossing her arms. I didn't like the way she said my nameâ€¦ like it was too silly for her serious mouth to muster.

"I want to help you get this job." I looked at the bridge of Sapphire's nose so that she would think I was looking her in the

eyes. Physically I could not lie to someone while looking them in the eyes, so this would have to do.

"Bullshit." She spat.

"Not for you." I growled back. "I want to help you get this job so that Ruby will as well." I racked my brain for something a fanatic would say. "I can't live without him performing either."

Sapphire's expression held no sign of breaking. "You're lying."

"No I'm not!" I insisted, thinking quickly. "Why do you think Ruby came back to this city at all? I'm the one that convinced him it was a good idea."

"He came back for me." She flipped her hair with a faint hmmmph.

>"Because I convinced him to."<p>

"Well!" His mother chimed in, to stop the argument in its tracks. "If you want to help so badly, then keep him occupied while we go to the library. I don't want him running off again."

"You can't send that contract by email." I tried not to sound frantic. "Haven't you heard about all the information stealing going on? If someone got a hold of that their careers would be over."  
>"I think I know what I'm doing. Please, now, we have to go."<p>

"But did you know that if you mess this up you won't have anything else to fall back on? Why would a studio like that give you a second chance? I bet a bunch of imposter Ruby's would love to have his birth certificate. No big production company could argue with that!"

>"Wally, move."<p>

"You don't understand!" I stepped out of the way, but raised my voice to a crackling breath. My lungs felt tight. "No one will respect you if you send it through email anyways. You think a company wants to see paperwork on the computer? Really? What about you Sapphire?" I stepped in front of her. "Have you ever tried to sign a paper over the computer?"

"No." she crossed her arms, looking as if she was debating on punching me.

"And don't you think it means more to them when you sign it in person?" I mused. "Where I come from that means everything."

"That little hick town?" She rolled her eyes. "You guys wouldn't know a contract from a handshake."

All we need is a handshake you ignorant brat! Because we actually trust each other where I come from!

"I wasn't born in Verdanturf." I stuck my nose up at her. "I lived in Goldenrod City for ten years. But hey, if you don't want to know what kind of people live there and how they reactâ€¦ fine by me."

"You were born in Goldenrod?" She asked in disbelief. "So you're



telling me you know the city where that company lives?"

"Yes." Dear Arceus I felt sick. I had never been anywhere besides Verdanturf, let alone out of the region! Lying for love had to have its rewards right?

"And you honestly think that we shouldn't email this letter?" she was not amused.

"I KNOW you shouldn't. Actually if you don't show up there in person I don't think they will give you the time of day at all."

"But how can I just show up there in person?" She snorted. "They want Ruby too."

"I'll get him to go too."

"Sapphire! Honey, are you coming?" Ruby's mother yelled from out in the living room.

"Hold on Ms. Stone!" Sapphire yelled before looking back at me. Her face was stoic and grave "Give me one good reason why I should trust you."

"Do you have any reason not to? I can get us plane tickets as well. I will personally take you to the studio in Goldenrod." I shrugged. "I have wanted to visit there again for a while now, so this is good for me too."

The look on her face was anything but trustworthy. I knew she didn't trust me as far as she could throw meâ€"actually that's inaccurate. She could probably throw me pretty far if she really wanted toâ€"and I knew that this was nothing for sure. I couldn't trust her either.

This didn't mean she had any reason not to trust me though. The pure desire on her face was enough to tell me she wanted me to be telling the truth as much as I wanted her to think I was. It was in her best interest to go to Goldenrod and see these people first hand as well; the selfishness was written all over her face.

I waited, mentally crossing my fingers and toes until she spoke.

"You figure out how to get five plane tickets by tomorrow. Any later and we will send the contract by email." Sapphire insisted. "Don't make me wait. This is my dreamâ€"!"

She turned away from me, shoulders back and her strong feminine build rolling with her steps. I watched her go in distaste, wondering what was so attractive about that, and mentally preparing myself for the five tickets I would have to buy.

Waitâ€"!

"Five?" I asked before she could disappear. "Why five?"

Sapphire glanced over her shoulder and raised an eyebrow at me. "The production company wants a package deal. That includes Brendan."

My stomach twisted. Brendan was coming too? Since when? She hadn't said anything to Ruby about them wanting Brendan too. More or less, the Altaria commanding scum was far more than I could handle. It was bad enough Sapphire was even a face in the big picture. But now Brendan too? The guy that shoved meâ€”a strangerâ€”for absolutely no reason at all.

My face turned white with discontent, but I opened my mouth and spoke in a strangled voice anyways.

"Fineâ€” I'll do it."

### 3. Chapter 22

~Ruby~

I didn't understand him.

But I knew I was falling in love with him. For obvious reasons of course, but still to my great surprise. Wally was mentally the strongest person I had ever met. Proving that between worlds of coal I had found myself a diamond. Never did I think it was even a possibility that me of all people, would find someone like him.

And in all reality I hadn't found him at all, he had found me. I kept thinking back to the day we met, when I had been so repulsed by him and yet I had acted so quickly to save him. Anyone else would have thought twice about mouth to mouth on a stranger, and all I could say in my defense was that I was happy I hadn't. Because I could have quite possibly let Wally die that day, and no matter how much I said it wasn't true, I knew that had I thought for even a moment longer, I would have.

I wouldn't have even known his name, let alone know the kind of love he could give. All my life I was forced to believe that being someone was important, and yet I had saved someone who was so small in the big picture that was my world, only to find that he was indeed "someone". To me he was at least.

He went from being a stranger to my best friend in a matter of weeks. Which was a very short amount of time considering the only other friend I had, I had since before I could even walk.

Wally was my sanctuary. In the blink of an eye he could make me feel better. Turn me around, stand me up and brush me off to face the world. I was amazed. All that and still more to give. That's all he seemed to do actually; give. He just gave and gave and gave and somehow still had the time to love himself. I envied him.

And what's more than that.

He loved me.

Me of all people.

I was not bothered by this in the slightest; actually I was very, very happy. For the first time in my life I felt like I had someone that would shower me in love just for being me. And though I had never gotten the chance to rain on anyone else before, it came

naturally with Wally. I wanted him to be happy; he wanted me to be happy. That was the basis of it all.

And he loved me.

A shiver rolled up my spine as I thought about him saying it. He was perfectly confident. Even honest when he said it. There was no miscommunication, there was no hesitation, and there was no reason for me to think that it wasn't true. I felt warm with comfort.

I was walking alone now, hood pulled up to hide my face from the crowds of people on the busy city streets. I had Biz at my side again, just in case anyone tried to get too close, but wasn't worried. Had someone approached me today, I probably wouldn't have minded. Wally put me in a thrilledâ€"but still nervousâ€"mood. I felt giddy and high and terrified all at the same time.

His plan was in full swing now, working somehow, though it was hard for us to keep up the act. Wally was trying his best to look like my biggest fan rather than my best friend, and I was trying to act like he didn't mean more to me than a fan. Both of those were harder than you would have thought possible, so we decided on another hotel room for tonightâ€"not that I planned on staying home anywaysâ€"but first we had to take care of business.

Wally had gone off in search of the library with his Kecleon, not convinced that my mother would be swayed by Sapphire completely. He planned on shutting the power offâ€"Arceus knows howâ€"but I couldn't complain. More than anything I just hoped he would be ok. The air was pretty thick with smog today, and not knowing if his lungs would hold up bothered me. I had to remind myself that he had his inhaler with him, and that worrying wouldn't do any good.

I was on a mission myself. To buy five plane tickets to Johto; which wasn't hard, but tedious because of my publicity. I would feel like a royal asshole by the end of the day if people didn't stop giving me curious looks. Their stares made my skin prickle with irritation and I was already strung up enough.

The airport in Mauville City was large and wider than any other buildings around here. While most everything reached up to touch the sky in its height, the airport needed more space for runways than anything else. It was flat and stretching far in every direction, yet no space went unused.

I remembered being a child and wondering how those planes could fly like they did, with their fancy coloring to resemble wild pokemon, and their heavy metal coating. People had tried to explain the laws of air pressure to me time and time again, but it never made sense. With moveable wings or light airy bodies, how could it fly? It was unnatural for such a heavy, boxy thing to be able to stay up like that.

However, I had traveled so many times in my life that I wasn't fazed by the metal machines like I once was. I used to picture all the horrible things that could go wrong up there in the air, and freak myself out enough to have to hide my face in the seat until I fell asleep because of the consistent droning noise of the engine. That initial fear passed over the years though, and ended up being a comfort. I had begun to ignore the engine and stare out the window at

the blank canvas ground we flew over. I used to wonder who lived in the single houses in the middle of nowhere, and why.

Of course now I wished it had been me living in the middle of nowhere. That was better than this.

"OH my!" A sudden shriek of terror made me jump as I approached an elevator door. It was as if I had taken a force field off, considering I couldn't have a large pokemon like Biz out in a public place like an airport. I had just called her back into her ball when a fit of giggling started up behind me. Fangirls. Gross.

"You're Ruby!?" One of them—a shorter odd brunette—squealed in delight as I entered the large grey box that was an elevator. Her hands were clutching the rim of her bulbous hat, smothering two hair-sprayed pig tails. I blinked, flashing an awkward half assed smile that probably looked more like constipation than friendliness.

"You are!" Her friend echoed her. "Ruby! Is it true that you were trying to save the town with your Salamence?"

"Oh—| no, no." I shook my head. "You're misunderstanding. I was being chased out of town."

They gasped in unison. "But—but that's not what the news said!"

"The news is wrong. You shouldn't believe it." I said tartly. "Besides, that wasn't even my Salamence. It was a friend's." my eyes flickered to the elevator lights too slowly.

"Oh well—| Can—we get a picture with you? Or your autograph?" the taller girl asked. She was more pale, with strange navy blue hair and a short coral pink jacket. She looked to be more sensitive to what I was feeling, so when I had to let them down she looked less upset.

"I'm sorry—| " I shook my head sadly. "I don't take public pictures unless it's for something like an event."

"Oh but please?" the brunette begged. "It's not like anyone else is around!"

"Lyra." Her mature friend scolded in a hushed tone.

"How about an autograph then?" she went on anyways. "I have a sharpie with me. PLEASE?"

I sighed and glanced at the buttons going up again. Two more floors. "Alright fine." With a huff I took the marker she jabbed at me.

"Sign my shirt." She turned around and held her pigtails out of the way, revealing the blank red material between her overall straps.

Sure I'll sign it; kick me. I thought bitterly, though writing my neat scrawl between her shoulder blades anyways. She giggled uncontrollably at the touch of my hand.

"Thank you! Thank you!" I pulled away from her unnecessary jumping with a flinch. The last thing I needed was to get stuck in an elevator with these two.

The navy haired girl turned then, with a sheepish smile, signaling that she too wanted my signature. I rolled my eyes when neither one was looking but once again, gave into the simple needs of these simple minded people.

They both thanked me excessively again before those elevator doors opened and revealed the main floor of the airport. It was crowded with flocking peopleâ€"bad for meâ€"but they all seemed too busy with their own problems to notice me. At least for the moment I was safe.

I knew the airport well, and I knew which direction to go from here flawlessly, which was good considering I could get in and get out quickly. Then I could go meet up with Wally and know he was fine. I would be able to breathe easily for some time in knowing that my mother wasn't emailing my life away for now.

Anyone else that whispered or called my name as I passed them was ignored professionally. I didn't break my stride, stiffen, or even peek in their direction. I blocked out the world and focused on my destination ahead of me. Five plane tickets.

Sapphire would be dreadful to travel with. She would be bipolar and moody and probably complain about the service on the plane. I wasn't about to buy her first class tickets either, so she would have to get over it real quick. I mentally hoped she would get seated beside some mother and her screaming child. Or worse, I hoped she would get seated by Brendan.

I was not thrilled about him coming, but not nearly as worried as I would have been two days ago. A thread of jealousy was all that was left, and it whimpered beside the massive structure that was my affection for Wally. Sapphire, who had been my number one for so long was now a mere shadow in the back of my mind. Brendan could have her. So long as I had Wally.

Had he ever been on a plane before? I wondered vaguely about what that would be like for him as I took an escalator down a floor to the ticket counters. Wally surely wouldn't be afraid of planes, but would he be claustrophobic in one? I couldn't be sure, but was happy to think of me being with him for the first time. Maybe we would both fall asleep together to the droning sound of the engine. Or maybe we would listen to music the whole time, laughing under our breath about things like "dancing" and nosebleeds.

I smiled to myself as I approached the counter, which instantly made the service lady friendly. She straightened up behind the counter and asked how she could help me today, though her eyes betrayed her for knowing who I was. She tried to be professional, I had to give her that much.

"I need five plane tickets to Johto."

"Ok, we have two planes fly to Johto every other day, one to Goldenrod on Sundays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. And one to

Olive on the opposite days." She folded her hands together in front of a computer screen facing her, waiting for my decision.

But I wasn't sure what to do. A plane to Goldenrod would put us right in the heart of the city that had the production studio, which made my stomach curl. But taking a plane to Olivine might be too obvious if Sapphire or my mother found out there was one directly to Goldenrod.

"When is the next flight open to Goldenrod?" I asked hesitantly.

She unfolded her slender hands and tapped her long nails on the keyboard in front of her before speaking. "It seems to be the fifteenth."

My heart spun. When exactly was the last time I paid any attention to a calendar? Not since I left my studio in the first place. I had marked each day of that month with an X until the day of the event I planned, which had been on the fourteenth of June. "What's the date today?" I asked, disappointed in myself for losing such track of time.

"The thirteenth." She raised an eyebrow at me in worry. I probably looked even more confused than I felt. I had run away about a month ago. It felt like it all flew by in a blur.

"Too soon." I shook my head, fearing the pain of knowing that we would be leaving in two days. I could pick a later flight of course, but I didn't want to go to Goldenrod at all to begin with. "What about Olivine?"

"The fourteenth." She smiled lightly.

I groaned internally. Tomorrow? That wouldn't give me and Wally much time to think of anything, let alone another plan.

"I can't leave that soon." I shook my head at the woman, though she wouldn't understand why I would prefer leaving later than sooner.

"Any other day is open Ru?" "Sir." She corrected herself, flustered with a blush at my name.

I never understood the thrill people got from addressing someone famous. It was just a name for Arceus' sake.

"Alright. Well." I squeezed my eyes shut and pinched the bridge of my nose. If this decision backfired in my face somehow I would ruin everything. And yet the fear of leaving tomorrow or the next day to a city that would guarantee my contract signed. It just sounded dreadful all around. I couldn't pick a day any later than three or so days, otherwise Sapphire and my mother would be suspicious and pissed. That was a risk I wasn't willing to take.

"I guess five tickets for the flight to Olivine." I said. "For the sixteenth." Two days would have to do, especially if I was going to Olivine, not Goldenrod.

"Alrighty." she mused, clicking her mouse back and forth quickly. "And what kind of tickets do you want? First class?"

"No, no. Just regular seats."

"You're sure?"

I nodded. There was something far too sophisticated about flying first class. It made me feel like I had to eat shrimp cocktails while kicking my feet up and watching some horrible 80's comedy. That was not the luxury I was looking for. I would rather cram six hours of sleep or music or crying babies before taking the highlight.

"Alright. Now, baggage you get one carry on per-person free, and every other bag after that is twenty dollars."

"Right." I agreed. These were the primary rules, everyone and their mother knew them.

"Name please." She went on and asked anyways, though she knew exactly who I was.

"Ruby Stone."

"Date of birth?"

"July, twentieth, nineteen ninety four."

"Are you going to Johto for your birthday?" She asked casually, just a polite way to make small talk while she typed in my information on the sleek computer screen. I was shocked though, for I had not even realized that my eighteenth birthday was in a week.

"No." I shook my head awkwardly. A week? Where had the time gone? My mind was so clogged up that I couldn't even begin to think about it. No birthday this year; my decision was instant.

"Oh." Was all she said, perhaps disgruntled by my tone. "Alright. Wellâ€¦ You are almost done here." She punched in a couple more words and then clicked something. Her eyes flickered back and forth before she went on and turned her back to me.

A little ways behind her she stopped to press print, turned back, hit another button on the computer, went back to the printer and hit the button again, until finally the slow machine coughed out paperwork.

"Just signâ€¦" the woman put it down in front of me, followed by a fake sunflower-wrapped pen. I scowled at the extra effort put into something so tiny it wasn't even noticeable, but couldn't allow it to bother me any more than that.

"Here." She pointed to a thin black line. "And here."

I read the rules and requirements quickly, knowing never to sign a contract without things being perfectly clear. Sure it was just a stupid airplane flight, but being that it was out of the region they couldn't take any chances. And neither could I. That very well could have stated that I was signing myself over to the airport.

"And finallyâ€¦ here." She pointed to the last line and waited

patiently until I scrawled over it, only slightly neater than I had on the two girl's shirts before. I set the pen down with a click and looked up as she turned to grab the five tickets. My heart thudded uncomfortably.

I took them, silently willing that Wally's plan would work and that this was all for the better. Fear rose in my chest though, as the thick paper material touched my hands and seemed to burn me. What if it didn't work? What if there was a flaw in Wally's plan? What if my mother caught on? Or Sapphire couldn't wait two days and a six hour flight for the company she was dreaming about.

Hastily I shoved the tickets into my pocket, muttering a quick thank you to the woman and turning away. Worry felt like a heavy cloud floating above my head.

What if it just didn't work?

â€¦..

~Wally~

"So she accepted them?" Ruby asked quietly, his voice muted in the dark but his hand hot and strong on my side. He moved it back and forth, teasing me and making my heart shudder and buck with temptation. I was already hard as a rock, and he wasn't helping in the slightest. Not while he was soâ€¦ biased to the situation. Not even a crack in his voice revealed hesitation.

It was hard to believe that only two days ago I was under the impression that Ruby didn't love anyone, which included me, and now he was stroking my skin with delicate but firm fingers. Now the only thing I was under the impression about was the fact that he was treating me like his baby. And I loved it.

"Wally?" he murmured, pressing his bare chest up against my back and pulling his arm out from around the front of me. He peeked over my shoulder to try and see my face.  
>"Huh?"<p>

"Sapphire accepted the tickets?"

"Ohâ€¦ yeah." I dismissed the subject from furthering. Sapphire had indeed taken the tickets, though she wasn't happy to know that we had to travel from Olivine to Goldenrod once we got there.  
>"So we're all set?"<p>

I nodded, listening to the silence for a prolonged moment.

"Are you ok?" he asked gently, placing his hand back on my side and squeezing lightly. My head spun with delight, but my lungs protested otherwise. After running around the city all day, trying to keep up with Sapphire and Ruby's mother while they went to do hideously girly thingsâ€"window shopping and pedicuresâ€"I was utterly exhausted and my breathing was not healthy. Plus it had all been for nothing, considering neither of them even tried to turn a computer on at any point in time.

It was depressing to know that such an illness could limit you from accepting further love from the person you loved most, but it did



either way. I sighed.

"My lungs hurt."

He pressed his forehead into the crease on the back of my neck. "I'm sorryâ€¦ is there anything I can do to help?"

Stop turning me on.

"Not really." I murmured, knowing that I never wanted this to stop. I loved that he was so willingâ€¦ so chaste in the way he touched me, and yet more alluring than ever before. A huge part of me wanted to let him hold me tighter, let him smother me with his strong armsâ€¦ and the other part of me was sure that if I did I would end up passing out again.

"Next time you buy the tickets, I be the spy." Ruby tried to laugh, but it came out in a sad way. He was still worried about this plan of mine not working. I wished I could comfort him, but I was too busy being comforted BY him.

"Deal." I agreed. "Or we just never go to smog infested cities."

"Oh you're going to love Goldenrod." He said sarcastically, though hugged closer to me as if to apologize for the comment itself.

I frowned. "I can barely stand it hereâ€¦"

"I won't let anything happen to you." Ruby stroked a lock of my hair back onto the hotel room pillow and kissed the bare skin of my neck until I gasped.

"Stop." My voice was choked. "Iâ€¦I can't."

He pulled away and unwrapped his arms from around me. I had never hated a side effect more than I did now. If having asthma and weak lungs meant that I couldn't be close to Rubyâ€¦ I shrank into the bed at the very thought, bringing my knees up as he flipped onto his back and sprawled out next to me.

"Sorry." He sighed, though there was no actual hurt in his voice. I focused on my breathing until it went back to its jagged normality.

"Noâ€¦ I'm sorry." I whispered, feeling dreadful at the thought of actually pushing him away. I had so much love to give and I couldn't receive any in return. There was something painfully cruel about that unbalances scale.

"It's not your fault." Ruby insisted. "You will be better tomorrowâ€¦"

But tomorrow isn't tonightâ€¦

"Here." He spoke suddenly, his voice perking with a forced pleasantness. I turned to glance over my shoulder at him, but felt an unfamiliar material touch my shoulder first. It was thick and heavy and warm from body heat.

I pulled the thing around to the front of me and ran my fingers over

the freshly washed, but won out material that was the band of Ruby's signature hat. My heart swelled, though I was trying to understand why such a silly item could bring me such stability.

"Maybe it will make you feel better." Ruby laughed softly to himself. "It used to make me feel better when I was down."

I turned then, like I intended to before, and scooted closer to Ruby's side. Gently I placed myself in the crook of his arms and took long deep breaths. The hat was drawn to my chest as if it really could make me feel better, and I shivered at the thought of ever despising it.

It smelt like him. Strong and powerful and sharp, but not overpowering. It smelt clean from the recent wash, but still took on an acquiring musky scent. I drenched myself in it stupidly, not caring that had I turned my nose up I could have sniffed Ruby himself. This was his little gift to meâ€”if only for tonightâ€”it was all I needed.

"Goodnight, Wally." The voice was seductive and promising, followed by a soft peck on the forehead. I shivered.

"Goodnightâ€”Rubyâ€”|"

#### 4. Chapter 23

~Wally~

The next two days went by painfully fast for the both of us. Ruby was counting the seconds it seemed, waiting for me to explain to him just how I planned to make his mother miss the flight to Olivine without anyone else missing it. The goal was to keep Sapphire along with us so that she wouldn't be suspicious and catch on, but to lose Ruby's mother so that she would be forced to be too late for any contract signing. Once we got there our goal was going to be to get Sapphire the job without Ruby.

I wasn't too keen on helping her, but it was what it was, and Ruby seemed convinced that it was wrong of us to do otherwise. He kept trying to tell me that Sapphire had a right to have a dream, like he did, but of course I just nodded my head and pretended I agreed. Even though in all reality I wanted nothing to do with her or her dreams.

Brendan was coming, though no one had so much as spoken about him since the first time Sapphire mentioned it. It felt like a fine line to be crossed with him. One side of it he would be fine, perhaps even more welcomed than Sapphire or Ruby's mother, but on the other side, he might snap like he did before. Either way I wasn't excited for him either. The only up side was that I figured with him there Ruby had a better chance of getting out of any package deals. Maybe the studio would settle for second bestâ€”Brendan.

But even so, we only had until Ruby's mother showed up in Goldenrod to sign the contract herself. After that neither of us knew what would happen, but neither of us seemed ready to think about it. Who knowsâ€”maybe something will change by then? I had to be hopeful,

that was all we had. Not even the time of day was in our favor anymore.

We walked the airport floor with familiar backpacks strapped to us and unfamiliar tickets in our pockets. Ruby and I stayed very close, bumping shoulders here and there, but trying our hardest to look unbiased to each other. There was a pent up desire to reach out and hold each other's hands, but under the close eye of Sapphire it was impossible. She knew nothing of the love we held for each other, and it was bad enough she appeared to be catching on.

Ruby busied himself with a particular ghost pokemon whose attention was so demanding he didn't have time to think straightâ€"which im sure was his plan. Sableyeâ€"or Midnight, as he would correct meâ€"was growing rapidly, looking bigger and bigger every time we let her out of her pokeball. She was starting to turn a very dark blackberry color, rather than the pitch black she was when she was first born. Her back was starting to grow very small chips of gems, and every now and again they would flash in the sunlight and blind some unexpecting victim. She still hadn't developed her gem eyes yet, which was a little frightening to look at, since her eye sockets seemed to bulge; but it wasn't ugly. She was by all means a pretty little pokemon. And Ruby absolutely adored her, so of course she adored him back.

He held the pokemon against his chest now, while her heavy head lolled and her eye sockets twitched in frustration. Her little claws were gripping the material of his shirt and she made an occasional snuffling noise. Ruby was coddling herâ€"againâ€"pressing his cheek against the side of her head and brushing back her jagged ear-like horns. I stifled a sigh at the sight.

I couldn't focus on Ruby at the moment, who I had to be focused on was his mother. She was ignoring us, wandering here and there, perhaps noticing people she knew or wanting to correct someone on what they were doing "wrong". She had this unamused scowl strewn across her much too red lips, and a kink in her much too thin eyebrows. I was trying not to stare, but honestly who wouldn't? She was a middle aged woman that couldn't pull off that look since her mid-twenties.

I told myself it was impolite to judge people, and tried to hear my Auntie's voice in my head as a reminder. Just this morning I had talked to her, promising that I was ok and that I would be ok in Johto as well. She actually liked the idea of me traveling to an ocean side city like Olivine, but of course she was unhappy about me going to Goldenrod.

I had tried my hardest to lie to her, for her own well being, but she knew me far too well, and I ended up telling her the truth about everything. At first I had been worried about what she might think of my recent choices and dangerous decisions, but like always, she had come through and showed me that she only wanted me to be happy. She was on my side through thick and thin, and I owed her the world for that. I had even told herâ€"and I'm sure it broke her heart a littleâ€"that I was in love with Ruby. She hadn't acted all that surprised, but had made me promise to tell my Uncle myself. She wanted no part of his religious lecture that would follow, and I couldn't blame her.

Approaching the tram that would take us to the baggage check was probably one of the hardest things we had to do. Not only was it humid and hot today, but being in such a confined space like that would surely make me claustrophobic. Ruby could sense this too, but I refused to let him comfort me. Not hereâ€”not now. I had a plan to work out in my head. Somehow I had to get his mother away from us. And granted she knew this airport like the back of her hand and I hadn't a clue where I was going, it wasn't easy.

I kept thinking that Sapphire would have to be the one to get her attention off of me and Ruby. She was the only one that could, and yet she was so sensitive to us that I didn't see how it was possible. Brendan might have been able to help, but of course he was too busy trying to talk to Sapphire that there was no hope in getting his attention long enough. Not to mention talking to Brendan was the last thing I wanted to do.

"What do we do?" Ruby whispered in my ear as we boarded the tram and let those huge metal doors slide shut behind us. I squeezed my eyes shut and gripped his sleeve tightly, waiting for the air that wouldn't come.

In the crowded space where no one could tell whose hand was whose he rubbed the small of my back gently, seeming to slow down the rest of the fast moving vehicle enough to let me relax. Deep breaths, strong hands, hope. That was the combination we needed.

The lights of a tunnel we flew beneath darkened, and in a moment of dimly lit blackness, above the chatter of strangers and the silent of our pitiful group, I heard a malicious and devious little squeal. It was louder than any other noise had been so far, and it made the whole cart of people jump.

"Midnight!" Ruby gasped, as the Sableye lurched from his chest and latched onto a familiar shape in front of us. I stared in horror as the daylight flickered through the tram windows and we approached our destination.

Ruby's mother shrieked in horror as the nubby teeth of our pokemon dug into her hand, scrambling to get any of the gemstone rings that lined her fingers. Midnight wailed in desperation as Ruby tried to haul her off, and I felt my stomach sink with nausea as she through her blackberry head back and screeched. I covered my ears, trying not to sink to my knees or pass out, but noticing that she turned her head up to the lights of the tram and below her bulging eye sockets were shimmering lights. I flinched, cringing at the sight of her eyelids ripping back to reveal two sightless and glorious diamond eyes.

"GET THIS THING OFF ME!" Ruby's mother howled in horror as the tram doors opened and the strangers around us fled in panic. Not one of them tried to helpâ€”that was just like city peopleâ€”and while Midnight lost her mind over the craving for gems to each, an idea brewed in my head.

I may have panicked a little, I admit, but elbowing Ruby out of the way was probably the smartest thing I could have done. He released Midnight as she tossed herself to the ground and rolled twice out into the airport.

"MY RING!" The woman howled in rage, stomping after the small pokemon.

"Ms. Stone!" Sapphire yelled. "I'll get it!"

"No!" Ruby shoved her back, gripping the pokeball she was about to release. "You can't! She's just a baby!"

"The hell with that!" Brendan disagreed.

"No!" I gasped. This was our plan! I tore my eyes from the fight about the break out between Ruby and Brendan and looked to see Sableye fleeing, her stubby legs not carrying her far from Ruby's mother as she howled after him, tearing through crowds of people who barked curse words at her.

I pulled Ruby around in a whirl. "Get them on the plane!" I yelled vitally. "I'll get Sableye!"

"Midnight!" he corrected me as I took off after the woman and the pokemon with the ring perched between its teeth.

â€|..

"Kecleon!" I yelled through a crowd of people giving me horrible looks and telling me to "shut the fuck up". I ignored them though. "Midnight!"

My voice was near gone from all the yelling, my lungs hurt worse that I could have imagined possible. Within moments I had lost sight of the little pokemon with the ring it stole, and then I had to admit defeat on leading Ruby's mother away from the plane. I knew that if it came down to it, Ruby would pick having his pokemon safe over his mother flying with us to Johto. And so panic rose like a engulfing flame through my body.

I wanted to sit down and cry some time ago. Just stop and let the agony have its way with meâ€"that's how bad my chest hurtâ€"but I knew I couldn't rest until I found this pokemon. It meant so much to Rubyâ€| so much that I even risked losing my own pokemon to find it.

Kecleon was out somewhere in this huge airport searching for the pokemon, perhaps having better luck than I was. I just hoped that wherever he was he stayed well hidden while I searched the floors, men and womenâ€"bad ideaâ€"bathrooms, hallways, broom closets, baggage check, and every other nook and cranny this place had. I asked every service man or woman I saw, only to be rudely shot down. No one bothered to help, no one bothered to give me advice, no one said anything.

I was so frustrated that I could have very well given into the desire to run away from it all. It was a two day trip back to Verdanturf; one if I flew through the night, but no matter how tempting that was I knew it was irrational. I loved Ruby, and he loved that pokemon, therefore I had to find it.

But after two hours of passing by menacing clocks that ticked way too fast, I had all but lost hope. Ruby would be already boarded the plane with Brendan and Sapphireâ€"possibly his mother tooâ€"and I was

out here with no hope in the world of ever finding this pokemon. It was a needle in a haystack kind of game, and the only way I was going to win was if I had sheer luck on my side.

"Sableye!" I croaked one more time. "Kecleon!" but there was no response, just more spite from the people around me.

Ruby was going to hate me. He would never love me or hold me again if I didn't find this pokemon. He would never even get the chance because he would be in Johto for Arceus' sake! A seed of blackness planted itself firmly in my heart and I felt suffocated with grief. I couldn't live without Ruby. Everything about this world was against me, and though I had been fighting it alone for so long! now that I had gotten a taste of not having to! I was helpless.

Ruby was my air. I needed him. I loved him.

"Excuse me!" A voice grew slightly louder in the crowd around me. "Hey sir!"

I turned, not expecting it to be anyone addressing me, but just to be sure it wasn't. MY eyes darted back and forth behind me, while all I was supposed to see was right in front of me. I jolted upright in surprise.

"Are you ok?" A husky voice asked. "You're wobbling around!"

"I have to find a Sableye." I rasped, looking up at the forest green eyes that peered down at me. There was a blurriness to my vision that I couldn't see past, but I knew whoever had approached me had very long hair and a soft baby face. To my surprise their voice was almost as agonized as my own.

"I think you should come with me!" he whispered, gripping my shaky wrist and pulling me along. I couldn't have refused even if I wanted to. And the way he sounded surely made me want to. I flinched as my feet grew weaker with every step, thudding painfully in my boots and rubbing a raw spot on my ankle.

"You know where?"

"I'm sorry." His voice was absolutely mortified and grief stricken when he released me. I looked up as his tall shape again came close, this time holding something small and dark in his hands.

"No." I whispered so softly. It was all the breath I had left in me. My lungs broke down then.

"I found her when she was!" the green haired man held the mangled bloody pokemon delicately, almost lovingly. "Trampled!"

My world seemed to shift then, and in an instant things went from bad to worse. The molecularly small situation was suddenly titanic in size.

"She said her name!" The man swallowed hard. "She told me it was Midnight!" and then she!"

My knees buckled under me then, and I gasped and shook and trembled

with a lolling horror. My eyes were suddenly pouring, and my nose was suddenly flooded with blood. My lungs were blocked off; yes that was it for them, they had admitted defeat. And suddenly then so had I.

Ruby was my air. I needed himâ€¦

I loved him.

And I had let him down.

His Midnight was dead.

## 5. Chapter 24

~Ruby~

Sixâ€”almost sevenâ€” long hours in a cramped plane listening to the sound of snoring and muted laughter from the seat behind me.

Wally hadn't made it. Somehow, somehow he hadn't gotten back to the terminal in time to board the plane to Johto with Sapphire, Brendan, and I. Which meant that he was alone in that huge airport with Midnight and no way of calling to tell me that he was ok. Misery crept its way into my heart. He was so devoted to doing his very best for me. Giving, always giving. Only this time it had caused more harm than good. What was I going to do without him?

I was outnumbered. Sapphire and Brendan could easily gang up on me if they wanted to, and I felt as though I was missing my right hand. It was horrible.

Staring out the window, watching the deep blue of the ocean pass by and then disappear into the nights blackness once the sun set. I focused my attention on trying to see out that window, rather than pulling the shade like everyone else did. I couldn't sleep, not while there was a cold empty seat next to me and worry growing in the back of my mind.

Had Wally caught Midnight? Were they both ok? Would Wally remember my phone number? I had forced him to memorize it before we left this afternoon for the airport, and he seemed to catch on quickly. He would call me wouldn't he? I shivered at the cool air being blown down across the seats and curled up into an even tighter ball.

Johto was a great region, with lots of meadows and peaceful lakes, surrounded by a warm ocean on all sides. Unlike Hoenn and its hype for being so touristy or Unova for being rough terrain and uninhabited in some areas. Johto was a family region, where many people had migrated over from Kanto years and years ago to start a new better life. It was a place of history, of upbringing, and honesty. I appreciated it very much as a region, but did not dismiss the fact that it had Goldenrod at its center, which was no better than Mauville in terms of rude city people.

I wondered if Wally would get the chance to see this region at all. Obviously not now, but would he get on another plane and find me here? If he called me I could tell him where to meet me, and then we could be together again, hopefully before we reached Goldenrod at

all.

"Hey Ruby." A voice came from behind me. Muted with sleepiness and echoed by a faint snore that came from Brendan.

"Hmm?" I grumbled.

"I'm sorry."

"What?" I turned then, trying not to kick the seat in front of me, but all the way around to look over the headrest and down at Sapphire. Her ocean eyes reflected guilt.

"I'm sorry we're making you do this." She said softly.

What had sprung this upon her? And why so suddenly? Did it really take being eight thousand feet off the ground for long periods at a time to get her to stop and think? Part of me wanted to be mad at her, but how could I? She was apologizing, something she rarely ever did.

"But you knowâ€¦ this is all I've ever wanted." She shifted up onto her knee and gripped the back of my seat with ease until she was propped up and leaning towards me. "I know you understand."

"You give me too much credit." I muttered and pulled away from her, flopping back down into my seat and sighing.

"Thank you." She whispered. "Thank you for doing this for me."

I'm not doing anything for you...

A familiar pang of guilt struck me in the chest. Maybe if Wally was sitting beside me it would be easier to see the big picture, the view that would dismiss this as Sapphire being selfish and not me. But either way one of us was only thinking for ourselves. Me wanting to be free and Sapphire wanting to perform; though very different things we strived for, we both wanted them very badly. I had to accept the fact that she probably felt the same way about not being able to perform as I did about not being able NOT to perform. Neither of us was wrong for wanting these things, but it made us both equally selfish.

Hellâ€¦ I had been selfish for as long as I could remember.

My head fell upon the cool plastic of the window and I closed my eyes painfully. Where was my backbone? Where was the part of me that was sure that things would work out in the end? The part of me that could dismiss Sapphire's apologies and thanks for being part of some evil plan. She was making me do this for her own good, and yet I couldn't find it in me to be mad at her anymore. Going to great heights to get something you wantedâ€¦ that was no crime; however I knew Sapphire was going beyond that.

Sapphire was the kind of person that would kill a stranger for a million dollars. She was that girl that didn't think beyond herself, though she wanted to believe she did so. It was occasions like thisâ€¦when she apologized or thanked someoneâ€¦that made her believe she was a good person. I knew otherwise though. Being a good person was going beyond that, it was the things you did when no one was



there to watch that made you above the rest.

Not to say that she was a bad person, she would never do anything against the direct law or something proclaimed as just plain wrong, but she didn't count ruining people's lives in those categories. To her people were breakable and meant to be broken. But she was wrong.

She was broken.

"Rubyâ€| " she whispered to me again.

"What?"

"Iâ€"I still love youâ€| you knowâ€| "

My stomach dropped in the same fashion the plane did when it hit turbulence, and I found myself speechless. Though Sapphire had never directly said she loved me, we always had this unspoken law that it was true. I had told her I loved her at one pointâ€"long before I even knew what love wasâ€"and he accepted it and left it at that. For us love was a touchy subject and meant to be stored away for later years. We both seemed to agree on that, so it was a complete shock to know she actually brought it up again. Was she just desperate?

I held my tongue, not sure of what to say. I did not love Sapphire, but I was afraid of breaking her already broken personality any more. You're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't. That's how I felt at the moment. And yet I couldn't speak to tell her the truth.

I loved Wally.

I loved his sensitivity to air, his gentle sweet nature, and the way he thought with his head but loved with his heart. I loved everything about that boy from his hesitant kisses to his erupting nose bleeds. I loved the way he said "folk" rather than just "people" and the way the city drove him mad. I loved his devotion, his desire to give and give and give some more even when it seemed there was no more room for giving. I loved that I could take my hat off around him and not worry about him seeing through my defenses because he WAS my defenses. I loved him from the inside out, and I had never even told him.

When was the next time I would see him?

When could I tell him?

"Rubyâ€| youâ€"you don'tâ€| " Sapphire was breaking, suffocating with shock.

"No." I whispered, not daring meet her eyes.

"Buâ€"butâ€| why?"

"How can I?" I shrugged blatantly. I wanted to tell her that she didn't know the meaning of the word love. I wanted to tell her that there was so much more to it than just being thankful to someone. Repayment did not equal love and love couldn't be given as repayment. Sapphire didn't know who she was or what she was saying. She didn't

know love like I did. She didn't know love at all. She only knew obsession.

Wally had told me once, a long time ago when we first met, that you couldn't make someone else happy unless you are happy yourself. I wasn't sure if I understood then but I did now. Wally was strong, he'd done his time living happily on his own, and I had learned in the short time of being with him, that I had more to be proud of about myself than I had thought. It was a level of respect I hadn't reached until now; and I understood.

Sapphire didn't love herself, she thought she did, but she truly didn't. She was unhappy, I could see that, but it was nothing Iâ€”or loveâ€”could fix. So I opened my mouth and repeated the words I thought so little of at one point in time.

"You can't love someone unless you love yourself first." I told her. "You can't make someone happy unless you're happy, Sapphire."

"Aâ€”are you saying Iâ€”I don't make you happy?"

"You don't understand." I huffed under my breath before answering her honestly. "No."

A gentle weeping begun behind me, shattering the dreams of Brendan and awaking him from his slumber beside her, and though she never told him exactly what the problem was, he never dared address me for an answer. The whole plane seemed to fill with misery, and even the flight attendants seemed to stop strolling the isle. Soft conversation from far in the back stopped, and one by one lights started to flicker off. Like the caverns of my strong heart, one by one they all shut down.

I had hurt Sapphire more than I ever intended to, but it wasn't until now that I felt some sense of peace. Wally would be proud of me for giving her a much needed explanation. He would hug me and tell me it was going to be ok. He would say he loved me, and I would say it back this time. I would kiss him and be unafraidâ€”I would love him openly for the world to see. Under the eyes of thousands of fans even. I wasn't ashamed to accept Wally and all his illnesses. I wasn't in the slightest bit embarrassed to call him my boyfriend. I actually pitied those who couldn't find someone like him to love.

Sapphire wept behind me, whimpering to herself and letting off some much needed steam. Her emotions were so powerfully raw from not being shown in a while that I could very nearly taste them on the back of my tongue. I wasn't sure how I was able to sit there and embrace the feelings without crying myself, but I did. I sat strong, not breaking. Because I was better than that.

I thought about Wally, and for once I did not feel afraid.

â€”

~Wally~

Waking up in a hospital was probably one of the hardest things I ever

had to deal with, so when I woke up in a rather petite office resembling a school nurse's, I was at least a little more relieved. No machines chirping with my pulse, no needles in my back, no bandages in my arms from taking blood. I sighed.

No clean air in my lungs though! I guess that was the downfall of it all. There was a gentle rasp coming from my throat as I tried to sit up and look around.

"Are you well?" A demanding voice asked me. I could only flinch at the large woman across the small room, washing her hands at a sink far too short for her.

"I think." I choked, reaching to feel for my inhaler, though I doubted it would help. My heart was the source of this particular pain, not my lungs though they played a fair share in it.

"Then go ahead and leave." The rude lady spoke with her back to me. "You just passed out for a few hours."

"Excuse me! but where am I?" I swallowed hard before putting my inhaler to my lips and pressing the button. I forced it in with the intake of my breath, and held it there for a long second while it burned away at my raw chest. The only pain I had ever come to enjoy was that of my inhaler. It was a good pain, a side effect that told me it was working.

"The airport." She sniffled and hacked at some mucus in the back of her throat. I curled my lip in distaste. There was no way an obvious smoker was qualified to be a nurse.

"I'm still at the airport?" I said, not sure if this was a good or a bad thing. My voice reflected sorrow as I thought about the white tile that had been spattered with blood. The dark, blood slickened shape of our pokemon baby that had been crushed.

Sable-no! Midnight!

She had come and gone so fast that it made my head whirl, and never before had I felt so much guilt. That was Ruby's baby girl, he loved her to death!

What was I going to tell him?

His phone number mentally replayed itself in my head over and over again with his voice. He had insisted I know it by heart in case something went wrong, and now I understood why. Everything happens for a reason, I knew that better than anyone else, but I couldn't put a place to this particular event. Midnight was innocent. She never even had a chance!

Tears threatened to choke me again, while I brushed myself off and wiped my hand across my face. There was dried blood all over me, crusted into the corners of my mouth and down my chin. If I wasn't so worked up over Midnight I would have been furious that this so called nurse did absolutely nothing for me. I could have died and she hadn't the decency to wipe the blood off my face. I didn't ask this time, I just went to the sign that showed bathroom and slammed the door behind me.

Sure enough the mirror reflected my emotions. I looked like I had been beaten to death, with dark circles under my eyes and blood all over my shirt and neck. I could only stare at myself, wondering where I had gone wrong.

I had only been trying to help this whole time, and I had messed everything up. Ruby's mother had probably boarded the plane after all, and I hadn't because I had been chasing down the inevitable. I could only imagine the betrayal Ruby must be feeling, and seeing though I hadn't contacted him yet, he probably thought I had given up. Not to mention that when I did call him and I would have to give him the horrible news, he would surely take it out on me. It was my fault anyways. And to top it all off, selfishly I couldn't help but wonder where my Kecleon had ended up. Had he gotten trampled as well? I flinched at the thought, trying to convince myself otherwise. Kecleon was fast and smart, he knew how to stay out of peoples way.

After dowsing my face in cold water and scrubbing the blood away with paper towels I turned to leave. I had to get to a phone. No matter how much I didn't want to, I knew that leaving Ruby without an explanation was impossible. I could only hope that he would understand my mistake. I could only hope that maybe somehow he wouldn't blame me for the pokemon's death.

Being so nervous made my stomach snarl with protest, and a wave of nausea hit me hard before I could make it outside. I leaned into the bathroom door taking deep breaths before opening it and approaching the dreaded office again. The nurse was bored looking, fiddling with a syringe and squeezing it gently to release a pale blue liquid. I had never seen any medicine that color before, and it set a bad taste in my mouth. I frowned.

"E- excuse me."

"What?" she squawked, again without turning to look at me.

"Caan I use your phone?"

"What? No!" she turned then, her thick shoulders rolling with the weight of her fat head. "Use the office phone."

I wasn't about to tell her that was what I had meant, or that she was stupid if she thought I wanted to use her personal phone. That was irrational, but then again, so were all the people in the city. With a huff I turned and stumbled to the ancient phone bolted into the wall by the office door. It was dusty and grey with age, but proved worthy of having a dial tone when I picked it up.

Ruby's number replayed itself in my head, over and over again. I knew it by heart like the back of my hand, and yet I was thinking that the only way I would be able to tell him anything was if it was over a message. There was no way I could listen to his voice without breaking down. I hesitated; thinking about his dead pokemon, wondering if there was any possible way a hole like that could be filled. Would he forgive me?

Would I forgive him if this whole situation had been turned around? I knew the answer was no, because I never would have blamed him in the first place. If one of my pokemon ever ran away like Midnight did, I

couldn't blame Ruby for not finding and catching it. If it was my pokemon, it was my responsibility. And yet I knew that this was a little bit different. Ruby's Sableye was partially my pokemon as well. I nursed it while it was just an egg, and though it took to him after being hatched, I couldn't help but feel just as responsible.

Who was I kidding? Ruby would never want anything to do with me after this. Tears lined my eyes as I thought back over the past few days. The emotions we had felt, the bed we had shared, the pained laughter of knowing that we would always be there for each other, no matter what happened.

With a start I hung the phone up, clutching at the wall with my head pressed against it, sniveling like a child and wishing I could control myself long enough to dial a number. What was I going to do without Ruby? No more kissing, or cuddling, or laughing. No more anything but memories. Memories that would haunt me for the rest of my limited days.

If I was any less of a person I would have left that phone hung up and never touched it again, but it was a part of me that I knew I could not escape when I had to fess up to something. I was raised to tell the truth and be honest. Never to hold something in that could harm someone else. I was taught boundaries of right from wrong so professionally that I could not deny the sensation to pick up that phone again and dial his seven digit number. Confess. You have to, I told myself, but mentally hoped he wouldn't answer.

One ring went by before my heart was lurched from my chest and went spiraling down an abyss inside me.

"Hello?!" Ruby's frantic demand sounded on the other line, muffled by what I could only imagine was wind. "Wally?"

And I was in hysterics. Clutching the wall and whimpering as tears fell past my cheeks to the floor. I could feel the nurses confused stare on me as I gripped the phone to my ear so tightly my knuckles hurt. "Ruby." I sobbed. "I'm sorry."

"Wally, it's ok. You can get on another flight. I'll make sure we wait for you in Olivine. It will only be a day."

I shook my head as if he was there to see me. "No Ruby. You don't understand." My voice was shrill. "Midnight."

"Wally." His voice grew soft. "It's ok."

"Midnights dead!" I bawled, drowning in my own tears. My heart was rapid in my lungs tight with panic. I pushed my face into the wall, clutching at my shirt collar trying to contain myself in any way possible. This was it; the end; this was all I had left of Ruby. He would never want me again after this.

"What?" his voice was so shocked that I saw no pretense. He was shocked, like I was, but it was much more horrified.

I whimpered. "She was- trampled. I'm sorry."

"Oh my Arceus." He huffed, making the phone line rattle with distress. "Buê"butê"how?" I could hear the raw choking emotion as he panicked.

"Iê"I lost herê"in thê"the crowds." I admitted. "Anê"and someê"one foê"found her. She didê"didn't live."

"Wally Iê"Iê|" Ruby spluttered helplessly. "Juê"just get on a plane."

"Whaê"what?"

His voice broke then, no matter how hard he tried to hold it back. I knew he was suffering, I expected that much. But what I hadn't expected was him to actually want me to come to him. I blinked in surprise.

"Just get your ass over here!" Ruby ordered, his voice choked, and then to my misery the phone hung up.

I wilted, like a flower in a heavy rainstorm, dropping the phone and letting it bob up and down to the floor with its springy cord. I sank to my knees, reaching for my inhaler to force more air into me. It wouldn't help; this was a pain that couldn't be subdued.

Ruby wanted me to come to him and I hadn't the slightest clue how. Sure I had enoughê"but just barelyê"money to buy a plane ticket. I knew I would figure a way on one fine, but I was faced with the horrible truth that it was not just Midnight I would be leaving behind. Kecleon, my partner in crime, the Bonnie to my Clyde, a pokemon I had since I was only seven years oldê|was still lost somewhere in the airport. And how could I leave him?

I couldn't abandon my pokemon, but finding him would be even harder than finding Midnight was, and though I wasn't worried about him getting trampled, I was worried that he would get out into the city and then there would never be any chance of me finding him. I didn't even know how much time had gone by since I passed outê|

I was fighting a losing battle it seemed, and all I could manage was to pick myself up off the floor and haul the backpack that was placed by the hard bed onto my shoulders. This was not me, I was better than this. I had spent my whole childhood fighting disease and illness that wanted to kill me, and yet one heartbreak could totally throw me off course.

Was Ruby mad? I couldn't be sureê| upset of course, absolutely shocked to say the least, but mad at me? I didn't want to think about the outcome of what would happen once I did get on a plane to Johto, since six hours of silent flight alone would only give me time to think about how horrible this whole situation was.

I shuffled past the hefty nurse once again, trying to contain myself under her pessimistic eye, while also finding it very hard to do so. I felt sick; sicker than I had in a long time, and it was not going to pass.

I pushed one the office door and opened a world of cigarette smelling city folk to my lungs. Everything felt wrong in my life. For the first time in a long time I felt truly out of place. Depression like

a heavy cloud hung over me, pressing down on my shoulders in such a way that I thought I surely wouldn't be able to go on.

"Keke!"

Almost as soon as I took my first step out onto the airport floor I was hit by an invisible force, jostling me back to reality and making my head whirl. It scrambled at my bloody shirt, trying to latch onto me in any way possible. My arms mechanically came around the small but thick shape.

"Kekekek!" A familiar face manifested in front of me, reeking of garbage and Arceus knows what else.

"Kecleon." I whispered as my pokemon pushed his face into my neck and cackled sadly. How long had he been waiting outside that door for me? How did he even find out where I was in the first place?

I hugged him dearly, knowing that under all the crazy circumstances we never would have made it back to each other. I figured someone must be looking out for me, someoneâ€¦ somewhere was cutting me a break. I sent a silent thanks to whoever that may be, and hugged my pokemon tighter, the last of my tears raining down on his sleek scaly head.

"Oh thank Arceus." I sighed, dwelling in the tiny bit of hope that flared in my chest. Just when you think things are going to bring you down, something changes to pick you back up. Of course, this did not dismiss the problems I had waiting for me in Johto, or the fact that I had let Midnight get away from me only to be killed. Guilt gnawed at my chest just as powerful as beforeâ€¦ maybe even worseâ€¦ but I knew that somehow, things could work out.

At least for the moment I had hope. However, my happiness could not be spared until I knew just what Ruby was thinking.

## 6. Chapter 25

~Wally~

Two long days had gone by, suffocating me, picking me up and flinging me around, punching me in the face repeatedly while I suffered in silence wishing that I could pick up the phone and call Ruby again without the fear of him not liking me anymore. Sure he said he wanted me to come to him in Johto, but he could have very well been mistaking. Who was to say that after two days of the horrible truth sinking in, he would still want me to find him?

Either way my weaker demeanor had taken me to the plane, and within the next day I was boarding a six hour flight to Olivine City, clear across the ocean and further than I had ever been before. I was nervous, and slightly nauseous from the turbulence, however I was comforted by the unnatural way they produced such clean air in such a small space. I had it hurtling down at me for the longest time, until the petite woman sitting next to me asked politely if I could put it lower because she was freezing. I couldn't argue, I was also cold with such air, so I ended up facing it away from us both and turning it slightly lower.

The woman had been decent company to me as we flew, and though it had gotten very late and dark at one point, she was still awake, eyes like those of a hoothoot to keep me focused. They were very dark amber, almost red in color, and intoxicating none the less. Her hair was ridiculously long and very light in color, making her all black clothes look surprisingly awkward. She didn't have a face to fit her appearance, and after she told me she was the champion of Sinnoh, I had lost all sense of understanding whatsoever.

She told me a lot about herself for being the champion, things I wouldn't ever seem to need to know, but liked listening to just the same. It was almost as if she was rambling on purpose, trying to keep my mind out of the way so that I wouldn't dwell anymore. In the end it had been herâ€”a complete stranger at the startâ€”that got me out of such a state of mind. Simply by accident she had coaxed me into telling her all about my problems. Six hours of nothing will make someone vulnerable.

We talked about Ruby for a long timeâ€”of course she knew who he wasâ€”and surprisingly I wasn't phased by her biased knowledge. She said that he always looked pained on television, and she knew that someday the boy would break free. However she was not prepared for me when I told her that I had done something horrible and let his newborn pokemon die.

"I had a pokemon like that once." She had said in her slightly too average voice, sadness lingering in her eyes as she went on to say that it had died because a feral pokemon ate it. Literally ate it. I flinched at the thought, but didn't say any more about Midnight.

She told me about her love life, and affairs she had not long ago with the famous red head champion from Johto. She said he was the best she had ever had, and that no matter how often he got mad at her, he never failed to be a gentleman. She described his muscles as bouldersâ€”which frightened me and amused herâ€”and his personality as calm and vicious as blue fire. I wasn't sure how to react to this particular topic, not while my petty little love story seemed so innocent in comparison, but she insisted on me telling her anyways.

I explained as best I could about the way Ruby made me feel, and how more often than not I would pass out or have some sort of chronic nosebleed in the process. I spilled my heart out to her about what I wanted and what I needed more than anything else. It was all so terribly mushy that she was actually laughing by the time I was through.

"Sex." She had said, making me flush. "Sex is what you need. No. Don't give me that look. I know you think the very word "sex" is dirty, but it's not. Its natural and wonderful and tickles you in places you can't reach on your own."

I never asked where those places were exactly; instead I asked if she was flying to Johto to see the dragon master-her lover. She said yes, and her eyes softened at the question, as if she could already hear his voice or taste his kisses. It made me sigh with jealousy.

What Ruby and I had to face was far more menacing than any amount of champion sex between the two strongest trainers of two completely



different regions. We had heartache to deal with, let alone the amount of willpower it was taking just to come up with a plan to stop the contracts in their tracks. I sighed again, wishing that our relationship could be as easy as sex, and realizing how much I wished we could have sex and forget about all the rest of the trauma for a while.

But we couldn't have sex. Not just because every time he touched me I nearly diedâ€"literallyâ€"but because we were both guys, and I wasn't so innocent to know that only women could receive the feelings a man could give.

Cynthiaâ€"the Sinnoh champion that accompanied me on the planeâ€"ended up writing her number down on my wrist and telling me that if I ever needed anything not to hesitate to call. I appreciated that very much, and swelled with warmth at the idea of someoneâ€"a strangerâ€"caring that much for someone like me. She knew nothing of my illnesses, therefore it was not pity that made her friendly towards me; I liked that. And I liked that she made me feel hopeful.

Her last words to me were given as she reached up into the luggage racks to grab her large suitcase.

"It's a shame Ruby isn't eighteen yet." She had said. "Then his mother wouldn't legally be allowed to sign anything for him. He would be an adult and he could do as he pleased."

It was those words, those simple, innocent words that opened up a whole new world to me. I didn't know when Ruby's birthday was, but I knew that if we could postpone the interview and the contract signing until then, he wouldn't have to worry about anything. He could be exactly who he wanted to be without question.

Cynthia hugged me as we walked off the plane and headed out into the main terminal entrance. It was a much smaller airport here in Olivine, and I already felt better in beachside town than I did in the large city.

"You call me sometime!" Cynthia waved goodbye, waggling her eyebrows suggestively. "We'll talk more about our men."

I rolled my eyes and looked down at the number on my wrist. As soon as all the important things I was dealing with went away, I would put getting a cell phone at the top of my priorities. But for now, it was merely a number on my arm.

With a sigh I turned and headed towards the elevator that would take me down to the main floor of the airport. I didn't know what was waiting for me once I got there, or what I would do if it wasn't Ruby, but I knew there was only one way to go from here. My heart thudded nervously as I stepped into the small lonely box.

Was he waiting for me?

â€|.

~Ruby~

It was the second night in a row I stood outside the Hoenn terminal

waiting for a midnight plane to land and release the passengers of whom I prayed one was Wally. I hadn't slept, I hadn't even given myself the joy of consuming food, since everything seemed to make me feel sick and alone. I was in misery, wishing, hoping that this was all just a horrible dream.

I had been so dumbfounded the other day when Wally told me what happened to Midnight, that I had hung up on him, surprised with myself for the sudden wave of emotion that hit me. I had dropped the damn thing and sank to the floor in dismay, biting my lip and trying to hold myself together as best I could.

Had I held her tighter, perhaps, had I tried harder to restrain her from eating my mother's ring, she would never have gotten away in the first place. Either way it was my fault, I had been too stupid not to realize that calling her back into her pokeball would have been the rational solution. Instead I missed my chance and watched her run.

And she ran into something far worse than I thought possible. She was trampled, killed under the feet of some oblivious bystanders that hadn't enough decency to watch where they were going. I wanted to hit something at the very thought. Who would step on a baby pokemon like that? And more or less who would just leave it there to die afterwards? How many people had stepped over her body not wanting to help?

I was weak with despair, thinking that the only thing making this worthwhile anymore was Wally, and knowing that I hanging up on him was the biggest mistake I had made. Was he so upset as to not come at all? That's how it felt while I waited, listening the sea lap hungrily at the pale white shores of Olivine. The airport was small with only one way in or out. I was waiting there, eyes scanning the sliding glass doors and flinching whenever they opened to reveal a stranger.

A plane had just landed about a half hour ago, and the passengers were starting to come out now, more frequently revealing young couples and happy faces of people on vacation or happy to be back from vacation. There was a subtle sleepiness from the people that made me rock back on my heels with a lulling exhaustion. I had to remind myself why I was here, and what I would do if I didn't see Wally come out soon. There wasn't any other option but to run away. I couldn't face Sapphire again without Wally. It was too hard.

Time slipped by like the wind blowing the dock below me. The airport was halfway over the water do to the runway taking up so much space on land, and that was not helping with my staying awake. I had to stay here, I couldn't fall asleep, especially not out in public like this. There was a comfortable hotel and bed waiting for me back on the land, but the very thought of returning without Wally again disgusted me. I forced my eyes open wider, though they sagged more in response.

Torture. That's what this was. The world was torturing me. I couldn't have Wally, Midnight was dead, and I would have to run away againâ€”this time from the boundaries of a contract. I would have to break the law, I would be renegade and if I got caught I could never live a normal happy life. My heart sank again, lower, deeper into the depression that was breaking me down.

I stared at the wood beneath my feet for a long moment, shivering as the sea blew wind across my face. Goosebumps ran up the length of my arms, stinging as they nipped at my neck with displeasure. These were not the warming shivers you got when kissing someone, or the sweet relief of a fireplace after being out in the snow. These were painful and lonely, calling for me to give up. I crossed my arms tightly over my chest and pried my eyes open again. I couldn't give up. There were still people leaving the airport.

The doors slid open two more times, one right after another, letting out groups of families with too much luggage to carry. Their pleasant atmosphere made my heartache, and when I saw a very small pichu gripping the shoulder of a young boy I sighed. This was doing me no good.

Another moment went by and the family passed, not daring question my still loitering. They cast me strange glances, perhaps trying to dismiss the fact that I looked absolutely miserable. I felt like suddenly I was the only person living in this world, and everyone else was just there to watch. Grief stricken and alone I turned to leave. One more night without Wallyâ€¦

I teetered along the dock with lulling steps, lazily dragging myself back to the shore where the hotel was stationed and waiting with unopened arms for me to return. I stuffed my hands in my pockets, hanging my head and gritting my teeth together. Where had I gone wrong? When would I be able to make things right?

"Wallyâ€¦" I whispered the name to myself, bringing back memories of talking to myself all the time. It was something I hadn't done in a while because Wally had been around to listen for so long. I realized that it was only loneliness that compelled me to make friends with myselfâ€¦"the only one who would listen.

"I can't believe this is happening." I went on, staring at the wooden boards below me. My steps were unbearably slow. "I miss youâ€¦" Arceus I miss you so much."

My own mind answered me, telling me that if he missed me as well he would have been here by now. My heart crumbledâ€¦"againâ€¦"and I felt numb with suffering.

"I should have told youâ€¦" I went on with myself. "You said you loved me, why didn't I tell you?"

Silence dragon on, clogged with only the ocean waves and the wind that sounded so far away. My thoughts stirred, making my head feel heavy and my stomach curl. Who was I? Why was I here? When would this end? All the questions I couldn't answer on my own. I sighed, stopping at the shore and looking down at the concrete steps that would lead me onto the sand. Where was the strength to go on?

I was just about to take that miserable step down when suddenly I was jolted from my thoughts and back to reality. My hat was torn from my head so fast, making me feel instantly naked. I flinched, whirling around to confront the thief.

"Tell me what?"

Wally stood, hands clutching my hat to his chest and smiling so sadly that it broke my heart. His face was very pale, with dark circles under his eyes and unwashed hair messy atop his head. He looked like he had been hit by a truck, and it was the single most beautiful thing I had ever seen. My heart leapt from my chest, and my once dead arms flew around him, gripping the small of his back and crushing his arms between us.

"Tell me what!?" he repeated, squirming so that he could wrap himself around me. His hands came around my neck, one still clutching the hat and one tugging on a fistful of my hair.

I laughed—"what a breathless sound"—and slipped my hands up under his shirt to feel the flat expanse of his back. My face went alight with color and for the first time in what felt like forever I really truly realized how much he meant to me. So much that my sole happiness depended on him. Shaking with relief I closed my eyes, holding him tighter and tighter until there was no space between us.

"Ruby!" he squeaked, yanking on my hair again, this time hard enough to get my attention.

"What?" I pulled back slightly, my half lidded eyes smiling and my lips perching, ready to attach to his if given the chance.

"Tell me." He whispered, so softly in my ear that I couldn't help but shiver. It had only been two days, but it felt much longer than that since the last time I had seen him. I in fact, actually felt something knew this time while he was here with me, running his slender hands through my hair and breathing slightly heavy. I couldn't answer his question, not while things had changed so suddenly in me.

All the blood had rushed to the pit of my stomach in a heartbeat, faster than I had felt before, but still familiar. A small—"very small"—gasp came from my throat, and this was in the same instant that Wally planted a sharp kiss on my lips.

"Ruby, tell me now."

He was so cute when he was angry—

"Please—"

And desperate—

My hands gripped his delicate sides tightly and I pulled him to me, so that our hips were pressed up against each other. The pressure made my head whirl.

"I love you." I stroked the length of his back. "I love you. I love you. I love you."

And he pulled away, having been too close for me to see his face, I didn't understand. But his hands released my neck and he shoved the hat back at me as if I had just insulted him. A second of shrill fright made me want to grab him and lock him up where he could never leave me again, all until I saw the real reason of which he rejected my love.

He coughed once, bending over and squeezing the bridge of his nose while his lungs contracted to the blood in his sinuses. He held his chest with one hand, too starstruck not to acknowledge the sudden intensity of our relationship. This was no longer a one-sided-he-loves-me kind of thing. This was powerful, so powerful that it made me tremble as if an earthquake was radiating inside me.

I realized, in that moment of pure awe, that every time Wally ever got a nose bleed it was because of me. Because his body somehow rejected affection with the spurting of blood. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry at this, all I knew was that any normal human body shouldn't reject such attraction. I blinked in confusion while he steadied himself and let the blood pour, a sheepish smile on his tender face.

"I love you." I whispered to him and he whispered it back almost instantly.

My stomach radiated heat like a furnace, and the internal smoke made me feel absolutely high with pleasure. He loved me.

"I've loved you since the first time I saw you." He spluttered.

"Wally," I reached out to him, thinking that what he said was absolutely corny in every way possible, but still so wonderful to hear. Moments ago I felt weak with heartache, and now I was suddenly weak with passion. My hips grew heavy as my hand fell upon his shoulder.

"Hmm?" He glanced up at me, smiling sheepishly.

"I," my insides tingled, distracting me from everything that I had meant to say and scattering my thoughts. Arceus forbid I get a coherent sentence out while my southern regions took over. I folded my arms tightly to my chest and smut my mouth tight. Ever since I had hit puberty I had a hard time controlling sexual tension. It was a secret I forbid anyone to know, but didn't help me in the slightest here.

"What?" Wally asked, dropping his arm and letting the remaining nose bleed to dwindle out. His upper lip was covered in blood but the majority of it had slipped into the ocean water beside the dock.

I was about to force words out of my mouth though I didn't know what they would be when suddenly a particular blue ink caught my attention.

"What is that?" I reached forward to grip his wrist tightly. He drew back in surprise as I overturned his arm to reveal the inside of his wrist. Scribbled into his soft skin was a thick phone number. I looked at him in confusion as he drew his arm back.

"I made a friend on the plane."

Almost instantly the tingling inside me stopped, and the half way erected member from below deflated sadly. Jealousy nipped at my heart, but Wally obviously was unfazed. He turned to me, hesitant with his faucet nose and looked up. The moonlight covered his face in

such a way that I could not be mad in the slightest. Confused of course, thinking that it had always been just me and Wally since the moment I met him, and what would happen if others were brought into that picture.

"Youâ€”you're not mad at meâ€”| Are you?" Wally asked eyes bright with hope. How could I be?

I shook my head. "It's just a friend right?"

"What?"

"That number. Iâ€”I'm not madâ€”| but the person, is JUST a friendâ€”| right?"

He surprised me by laughing, short and stiff, rolling his eyes. I didn't understand. I wasn't laughing, I was completely serious. My eyebrows came down into a confused frown.

"Iâ€”I meantâ€”| aboutâ€”|" Wally looked away, his amusement fading almost as quickly as it had come. "About-what happened at the airport."

My heart sank, and I understood. He wasn't asking me if I was mad at him for a number on his arm, he was asking me about Midnight. Grief made me passionate though, and before I could even begin to think of how he thought it was somehow his fault, I was taking his chin and bringing it up so that he was looking at me.

I didn't flinch as I kissed his blood smeared lips, but had to restrain myself from lapping at the strangely metallic taste of it. He melted into me, like the first time and the second; my kiss rendered him helpless on this black ocean night.

"No." I broke away, leaving him gasping for air and clutching my shoulders for support. He sniffed tightly as I took him by the hand and stepped down the steps onto the sand of the shore. I didn't want to talk about Midnight, I wasn't ready for that kind of conversation at the moment, since her loss was still snapping at my heart like a pack of hungry Houndoom.

"I'm sorry." He whispered despite my answer.

I shook my head at him. "It's not your fault."

He squeezed my hand lightly in response, crossing the moonlit sand to the walkway leading to the oceanfront hotel. Neither of us spoke again, but while I strode forward with more strength than before, my mine reeled back to that once lonely feeling of passion. I focused on it, not wanting to bring up any more troublesome topics.

How easily Wally had amused my insidesâ€”| My heart fluttered, growing worse and more severe as we approached the hotel and came to find ourselves entering a joint room with Brendan on the other side of nothing but two locked doors. Would he be a problem? I rolled my eyes at myself. What did I care what he thought?

In the dark of the hotel room I turned to Wally, glancing down at his scruffy appearance and smiling lightly. I was still tired, but was past the point of getting up early tomorrow anyways. I lead myself to

believe that we could sleep in as late as we wanted, and figured that staying up later was a given. My sudden horny desires refused to let me believe otherwise.

A devilish but weak smile came over me, and despite myselfâ€”despite all the trauma I would wake up to in the morningâ€”I allowed one night to go by without worrying. I needed this. We needed this. Gently I brought my hand up to touch his face in the dark, and though we couldn't see each other or gauge each other's reactions clearly, I spoke in the most subdued voice I could manage.

Make me forget everything tonight. Love me and let me love you. Just for a moment even, it would be better than nothing. I leaned in close and let my lips feel their way to his. They trembled as I pushed them open and spoke directly into his mouth.

"Let's take a shower." I suggested, slipping my tongue past his lower lip into the depths of his arousal.

## 7. Chapter 26

~Wally~

Blood. So much hot, steaming, boiling, blood everywhere.

Ten minutes over the sink and nothing had changed yet. My nose was still pouring, refusing to stop while it made me lightheaded and my throat itchy. I was groaning, trying to get the image of Ruby naked out of my head. Not because it was bad, but because it was so unbearably good that I would die from too much blood loss soon.

The sink was staining red from me, and I had my head limp on it, arms splayed out beside my head sticking to the horrible red mess. My hair was plastered to one side of my face, but I just didn't care anymore. I hated this; I hated it so much I wanted to cry.

Never before had nose bleeds bothered me. Mostly because before I met Ruby I would only get them here and there, occasionally when I bumped my nose or when someone thought it was funny to jump out from behind a wall and scare me to death. But ever since Ruby came along they had been so frequent that I was beginning to think I was secretly a girl pms-ing out of her nose. I was so desperate now that I even considered shoving tampons up there just to stop the flood long enough to let me take a decent breath.

Ruby was in the shower now, washing thoroughly with strong smelling shampoo and hotel body wash that I could very nearly taste on the back of my tongue. The sound of his quiet singing was muffled by the water and every now and again he would say something to me and make me pout in response. It was getting to the point where I wanted to whimper like a child whose favorite toy was taken away.

And what was absolutely worse was that I wasn't sure I could get in there with him even if my nose did stop bleeding. My breathing would be so ragged, and Arceus forbid if he kissed meâ€”even touched my while I was naked. I would surely go insane.

But I wanted itâ€”I wanted it so bad.

Angry tears threatened to break through my eyelids as Ruby sang the words of the song he taught me to dance to.

"Ruby!" I whined, gripping my own hair and threatening to yank it out in frustration. He stopped singing almost instantly, and a second later I could see him drawing the curtain back in the mirror and peeking around to look at me. Our eyes met, though my back was turned to him, and he smiled sadly at me.

"You can come in." he suggested. "I don't care if your nose is bleeding."

"I can hardly stand!" I huffed dramatically.

There was a moment of contemplation in his eyes, thinking about his options carefully before drawing the curtain back and hiding from my sight in the mirror. My teeth gritted together in aggravation. I wasn't tolerant of this kind of thing! I was going crazy!

A moment later the curtain drew back again from the opposite side and a single toned leg stepped down onto the tile floor behind me. Faintly a gasp rose in my chest as a sopping wet male model version of the Ruby I knew approached me. I coughed, my face flaming with heat, and hid my eyes beneath my hands. I couldn't look at him, it was too much.

He bent over me in all his naked glory and kissed the side of my head, sending a shower of droplets down my face. I shivered as his lips tenderized the tip of my ear, and his wet hands slithered under my shirt and up my back.

"Arceus I love you." I choked, though embarrassed for him to see me in this condition. "But you're killing me."

"You said yourself you just have to get used to it."

"I-I-." I lifted my head slightly to look at him, eyes feeling heavy and glazed over with seduction. His mouth tickled the corner of mine while his open hand came around me, playing at the edge of my shirt and lifting it slightly.

"Mmmn!" Ruby let out a throaty purr, ignoring my spluttering and moving downwards on my shirt to meet the skin of my side. He held the material up, leaving wet spots from his hands as he leaned in to press his lips just above the bone of my hip.

"Stop it." I begged as blood dribbled down my chin into the sink. My blood was in two completely separate places at once. It was coming out of my nose much too quickly, and it was also gathering in the pit of my privates. This left my chest with nothing but a raw emptiness that stung like the sharp intake of air. I trembled, pushing a hand downwards and trying weakly to pry his face from my skin.

It felt so good!

Too good!

He ravished me, licking and kissing and biting at my skin, turning me so that his teeth could graze the flat planes above my belly button, rubbing with his firm wet hands at my sides and slowly easing my



shirt up until he could maneuver it around one my arms. I was squeezing my eyes shut, wishing that this wasn't every bit as painful for me as it was glorious. I whimpered and cursedâ€"something I very rarely doâ€"and tried once again to push his face away.

"Stâ€"stop." I begged, pushing my thighs together and letting my head loll on the counter. My voice was nothing but a rasp now, and while tears fell over my cheeks I felt absolutely horribly lustful it made my head spin.

Thankfully, at the sound of me crying, Ruby stopped, unable to tortureâ€"and arouseâ€"me anymore without being guilty. There were moments when I seriously thought he was the single most unstoppable force of nature I had ever come across, and this was one of them, but it was also times like this that he proved perfectly loyal and understanding. His hand reached into my pocket and pulled out a small silver tool that would help stabilize me.

I took it gratefully, having held my breath for uncountable seconds, and forced a gulp into my chest. It was mixed with the harsh intake of blood that should have gone out my nose, rather than back up my sinuses, but I couldn't complain.

Ruby looked at me, his shoulders hunched forward and his arms still around my back, waiting for me to say something or at least let him know that I wasn't suffocating.

"Jerk." I huffed.

"Wally." He whispered to me, honest sincerity in his maroon eyes. "What am I supposed to do with you?"

I frowned, sadness sweeping over me like an ocean wave. "Iâ€"I don't know." I shook my head. If I let Ruby love me to his full potential I would end up seriously harming myself. I couldn't take this kind of seduction; my body physically rejected it for some reason, and I had been raised to trust my body over anything else.

A sullenness grew inside me for a second, and it seemed to spread like wildfire to him. He sighed, laying his soaked head in my lap. Along with the intense atmosphere, my nose seemed to finally dry up, and I realized that it was only when I was positive that nothing further was going to happen, did my stomach detach itself from my erection, and crawl back up to the safety of its home. I felt dilapidated with defeat.

Me and my new friend Cynthia had talked about sex a lot on that plane ride over here, but it never occurred to me that I wouldn't be capable of having it or anything like it. Of course I expected things to be hard, but after such mediocre acts tonightâ€"compared to what they could beâ€"I realized that anything past this level of intimacy was pretty much impossible. My heart sank.

Wouldn't I ever get used to having him love me? Not mentally, but physically?

"I'll let youâ€"clean up." Ruby moved then, taking his head from my lap and reaching up to grab a towel off the rack behind me. I forced my eyes to look away before I could see anything below his waist. Until he wrapped it around himself I was shielding my face from his

view, wishing I could reach out and beg him not to go.

Who was being rejected here? Me because he was leaving me alone in the bathroom, or him because I couldn't accept his affection? It was a terrible game we were playing here, and I didn't know when it would end.

Ruby shut the door with a soft thud and left me alone, keeled over the sink in despair.

"I love you." I called after him, but it was too faint to hear beyond the door.

â€|

~Ruby~

I couldn't say I was sure what happened last night was real or not, it just didn't seem like me. I had been completely off kilter, seducing Wally into a twenty minute chronic nosebleed. That wasn't like me in the slightest, and yet I knew that it had indeed been me. It had been me; raw and passionate and hung like a Rapidash.

It took the sheer pain of missing him for too long to turn me into a lustful monster, needing, wanting, craving him like a drug. There was nothing that could turn me off last night, and that needy sensation had kept me awake all through the darkest hours. Neither of us really slept, but we kissed. A lot. And I had gotten him down to nothing but boxers after he settled his erratic breathing in bed beside me.

At one point I had shifted him from his side to his back, and while the blankets tangled with us I had managed to give him a short pleasure-filled rub down with my own body. There was no complexity to the action, and yet I felt as though I had entered a million different cavities of his emotions. He cried a lot, never harshly or long enough for it to mean anything, but out of frustration and wanting. Wally also scratched a lot, using his slender fingers and neat nails to fend me off when it got to be too much. I didn't mind that though, I actually sort of liked it.

Surprisingly, after such a night, you would think I had seen it all, but that would be a lie. Wally was still a mystery to me, and though he had seen more of me I knew he felt the same way. We never actually had sex, but you could believe as such. I dry humped the hell out of him, slowly moving, stroking his hips with my own and planting soft hickies on his chest while he groaned in response.

In the end he had passed out on me again, only to wake up a moment later lying on my chest with tears in his eyes.

"I hate that I can't handle this!" He had ruined the mood, throwing his hands around my neck and probably making things worse for him. His heart was fluttering, battering my own chest with such fright.

"It's ok." I had told him before lying. "It's not like I can't control myselfâ€|"

"Iâ€|I don't want you to control yourself." He went limp on me. "You shouldn't have to."

That was the last thing we said to each otherâ€”aside from "I love you"â€”for the rest of the night. Of course I was coherent enough to know that Wally was worth it with or without sex, but it still nagged on my heart that we were so far away from it. Making out and rubbing each other was lovely, don't get me wrong, but it was not nearly as amazing as I could be. I found myself daydreamingâ€”or maybe I was asleepâ€”for the rest of the night, thinking about the way it would feel to dominate over Wally, and then mentally sighing when reality came back and told me otherwise.

It seemed everything about us physically was wrong. The strength in my push, and the relapse in his pull was too out of balance. He had narrow, tight thighs and of course that would translate over to his ass when the time was right, whereas I was thick and husky in comparison. I wasn't sure Wally and I could have sex, even if nosebleeds and breathing didn't get in the way. Not to sound conceited, but I was probably too big for him anyways.

Those thoughts filtered in my head for a long time, swimming in the turmoil that was my brain and making me exhausted. However I couldn't be the first one to fall asleep between us, Wally's random sniffing and sighs proved he was still uncomfortable, and I couldn't handle that. I waited up with him, holding him, doing nothing by brushing back his hair and singing softly until he fell asleep. It was peace at last, and his lungs cleared with the exhaustion. I fell asleep with him after I was sure he would be fine.

Dreamless slumber had never felt so good before, so when a sharp knocking woke me from it, I was automatically in a terrible mood. Not being a morning person to begin with I hid my face in Wally's back letting his warm skin comfort me.

"Ruby!" The muted sound of my name was coming from Sapphire, who I had forgotten had the second card key to my room. I almost jolted away from Wally at the thought, but was much too enlightened by his hand curling in mine as if to tell me not to go. I stayed put, though hiking the comforter up over our heads and getting lost in the orange tinted darkness beneath.

I kissed Wally's face once before Sapphire yelled to me again, warning that she was coming in. I flinched at the thought even before the door clicked open.

"Ruby you lazy butt! Get up we have got to go!" she sank her knees into the queen size bed in front of Wally, reaching over to grab the blanket as if we were best friends again. She loved to torture me with morning light, she always had, but this time she would have a surprise waiting.

Wally turned and shoved his face into my chest so he wouldn't have to face her when the blanket was tugged off.

Sapphire screamed.

A high pitched yelp that left her gaping in shock at the sight of her ex boyfriend cuddling with a sickly boy from a town no one has ever even heard of. Her ocean eyes retreated into panic and back again, whirling with confusion and the desire to punch something. She glared down at us, thoroughly disgusted with the looks of Wally's purple and

red bruised chest. Now that I looked there were even some splotches along his side, one distinct one above the bone of his hip. I blushed, a shaky laugh escaping my throat.

What had I done last night? Of course it didn't seem so bad thenâ€¦

"What. The. FUCK." Sapphire choked. "Ruby!"

"Errâ€¦ Goodâ€¦ morning?" I ran a hand through my messy hair, not even caring that I didn't have my hat on. I couldn't even remember where I took it off last night.

"What the hell are you doing!?" She snarled. "You're GAY?"

"No!" I defended instantly, making Wally elbow me in protest.

She gestured madly to the boy who was still shrinking into my chest. "Explain this then!"

I bit my lower lip, thinking slightly sheepishly and resting my chin on Wally's shoulder. "Ummâ€¦ I was drunk."

Sapphire just shook her head at me. "Thâ€¦this!" she pointed at Wally. "Is the reason you don't love me anymore?!"

I perched my lips, trying to fend off the awkward with humor. "Yeahâ€¦" but it wasn't the truth. The truth was Wally simply made me realize that I never loved Sapphire in the first place.

"I hate you!" She stomped her foot. "You're GAY! You went gay after me?" her face was aflame with embarrassment and distaste. I tried not to laugh. What guy in his right mind wouldn't go gay after her?

"I'm not gay." I repeated again.

"Liar." Wally muttered.

"I'm not partial to any gender." I defended myself.

"So you're bi?" Sapphire crossed her arms.

"No."

"Then you're just plain stupid!"

"Iâ€¦ only loveâ€¦ Wally." I pressed my face into his shoulder. "Not because he's a guy, or because he isn't a girl, but because he isâ€¦ Wally." It was a stupid excuse for the point I was trying to make, but it was my reason just the same. Had Wally been a girl this whole time maybe I would haveâ€¦wait no. Just no.

"Ok I'm bi." I allowed, my eyebrows coming together in my own confusion. Wally a girl? That was wrong on so many levels. Wally had to be a guy, that was all there was to it. Even though I treated him like a girl at timesâ€¦

I shook my head clear of the thoughts. Now was not the time to start questioning my sexuality. It was Wally and only Wally, so what did it matter?

Sapphire was fuming. "Well I don't give a shit what you are anyways!" she lied, throwing my hotel room key down at us. "Just get your ass up and get ready to go."

"What time is it?" I glanced around for a clock.

"Nine." She spat, turning heels and leaving.

"I'm not getting up until noon!" I yelled after her, but she purposefully left my room door wide open so I would have to. I groaned and Wally punched me softly when she'd gone.

"What?" my eyes narrowed at him.

"Not gay?"

I sighed, rolling my eyes and trying to find the strength to get up and shut that door before someone walking in the hallway would see us. It would be one long day that was for sure.

"Just for you babe." I smirked wickedly at him, leaning in to peck him on the lips before hauling myself up. "Just for you!"

## 8. Chapter 27

~Brendan~

There were some things in life- I realized too late-that you just couldn't change. Fate was one of them. Perhaps the most important one.

All my life I had spent growing up a normal, happy child with friends on the street to scuff my knees with and get bandages from their mothers. I had been the wild one of the bunch, always pushing, always trying to fit through a hole too small for me. I wanted to see what was on the other side of the walls that confined me, but it was only television that had allowed me to do so.

I was ten years old when I met Ruby Stone for the first time. He was on a tiny screen in which my mother had to fix the satellite wire to see. It was in black and white—"very outdated for our day and age"—and it was the single most amazing thing I had ever seen. Ruby was a rookie handler at the time, fumbling around with his pudgy hands and pudgy poochyena, flushing whenever the judges addressed him. He was bold, even as a child, and I envied that. Not to mention it was like looking at my reflection.

Ruby and I both had the same black hair that liked to stick up where it was unwanted. We had the same broad shoulders—"though I was at least an inch taller than him"—and we had the same impatient desires. I was a year younger than him, but I had never doubted that somehow we shared the same mother. At one point I even asked my mother if he was my brother, which made her laugh and shake her head.

My mother was older for her age, worn on from years of living poorly. We never had money, and when my father passed away it was one of the hardest things we ever suffered. But neither of us gave up, and I

worked every grueling hot summer since the age of twelve to help pay house payments and buy us our next meal. We never had much, but we always had each other.

It was this unconditional love that lead my mother to "kick me out" when the newspapers claimed needing a replacement for the runaway star. I hadn't even known Ruby ran away when it happened, but I was both thrilled and horrified.

All my life I spent envying Ruby, wishing I could be him and live the easy life. I never looked down upon my mild poverty—the shack that I grew up in—but I knew how much better life could be without it. Ruby had been my escape, the person I dreamed out being since the moment I saw him. I wanted to live a life of peace life that, and of course this lead me to resent him slightly. I always had this strange, mock competition with the performer that didn't even know I existed. It was stupid and irrational, and I quite disliked myself for ever feeling the way I did, but I did none the less.

When Ruby ran away a whole new world of opportunities opened up for me. I was happy about that, thrilled even, but I was also disappointed. Ruby was my idol, and all that time I had been under the impression that he was happy where he was, proud and confident as the interviews. So when he ran away it was like a personal slap in the face. He had it all, he had the glitter and glam and show life that people like me never touched. And he selfishly ran away from it.

It hurt me to know someone I had never met before had hurt me so bad. I never regarded him as someone who took what he did lightly, but apparently it was light enough to just toss aside and forget about. He had it all, he threw it away. I can't stress that enough. Penthouse to mediocre shack—whatever the place, I didn't understand how he could be so arrogant. Did he have no pride in it? I couldn't understand, but I knew that there was a deep grudge to be held either way.

And so I went, thinking about all the potential things that could change for me once I got there. The studio was deep into the city I lived just outside of, so I had time to gather myself and make presentable with a lacking emotion that I needed. I had gone in with a bad taste in my mouth, seeing things in person that I only ever expected to see on television. I was nervous, terribly nervous, only to find that most everyone actually mistook me to be Ruby at first.

I guess this gave me courage, somewhere down the line I racked up my confidence and presented myself to the studio. They welcomed me with cold, hard open arms, and I had not seen the bitterness in their eyes. Truth was, they wanted Ruby, not me, and no matter how much I wanted to be Ruby I never would. I was playing second best, and that was painful, especially since it seemed I had lived a life deserving of first place for too long.

I hated Ruby for the short time that I was there with Sapphire, feigning the desire to love her because that was what Ruby had done. Till this day however, I didn't know if it was my getting back at him for running away and ruining the pride I had for him, or if it was me trying to be him that lead me to Sapphire. I was conflicted, but put on this act of understanding where it was needed. No one saw me as

the hardworking poor boy that I once was, but they saw me as Emerald; someone to follow in Ruby's footsteps.

And the more I stayed there the more I realized that was not who I was, but just an act. I had come to the conclusion that I didn't want people to know me as anyone other than me. I wanted them to see the hard work I put into my past, the days I spent wondering if we would be kicked out of our old shack because of money issues. I wanted the public to love me for being me, and yet the only person I could be to them was Emerald. It was an alter ego I didn't have much choice but to accept.

Though I never truly warmed up to the studio and their ways, a week into stressful shows and insincere love towards Sapphire—who turned out to be a total bitch—Ruby came back. I was mortified, furious, and livid at the thought of him leaving and then coming back just like that. He had ruined so many people's dreams that I knew I wasn't going to be the exception. He would not just take back what he gave up. I wouldn't allow it.

That day down in the basement of the studio, where I had caught him and Sapphire together, I had been pushed to my limit. And such dramatic actions lead me to do dramatic things. I had never been an angry person, but up until this moment I hadn't known real anger at all. I wasn't mad at Ruby for kissing Sapphire—though it may have sounded like it at the time—I was mad at Sapphire for kissing Ruby.

Didn't she have more dignity than that? Even if it was "cheating" on me—cheating on a contract actually—it was with Ruby. The person that ruined her life! She just took him back, just like that. All my respect had been lost for her too.

I was determined to run him out of the city. I wanted to be the hero for once; I wanted to see my name on newspaper fronts and on the television. Little did I know the whole city was on Ruby's side, and my attempt got me into more trouble than I could have imagined.

Let's get something straight here; Ruby has all the support in the world, fans, money, a fucking huge house, glorified EVERYTHING, and he runs away from it all. NO ONE, not one person but me is mad about this. Where is his vindication? Who does he think he is? And then of all things, to come crawling back?

This was the impression I was under for the weeks I had spent in Mauville City, and the short time I had spent watching from behind the loop as Ruby and Sapphire—and this new face, Wally—had twisted the stories in my head to utter and complete distortion. Who was wrong? Who was right? Why did Ruby really leave? It was obvious now that there was an ulterior motive.

I had spent my time hanging back, wondering if I was still liable to act like I liked Sapphire or not, and watching with great admiration at the former actor that both made and destroyed my life. I was absolutely jealous of Ruby, I knew that and was man enough to admit it, but of all those years watching him on Television suddenly meant nothing. I didn't know Ruby. And I certainly didn't know that he was justified the whole time I thought otherwise.

Sapphire was a bitch, his mother was a bitch, his managers "who were also mine for a short period of time" were nothing but bitches. So why wouldn't Ruby want to leave? It had taken me up until this point to realize that money and fame could not make you happy. It took family and friends to do that, something I had that he never did.

And so what was once envy and hate turned into a gentle pity. I had seen Ruby suffering on the plane ride to Olivine City, lost without the one person that had ever shown him love or friendship, and while I tried to act like a friend to Sapphire, I couldn't help but dislike her for her own selfish actions. Ruby was vindicated. I forced the words into my head over and over again. Ruby was vindicated.

Ruby was innocent.

And I was too stupid to realize it before.

Embarrassment and loneliness drew in my chest while Ruby sat across the table from me, one hand underneath twined with Wally's and the other pushing a milkshake towards the strange boy with the cantaloupe colored hair. That was the same boy I had shoved out of anger the day Ruby came back to the studio. Guilt snagged at me like barbed wire.

Sapphire had just gotten up to go to the restroom, and I had to admit it to myself that this was probably the only time I would have to apologize for past actions. Wally was innocent as far as I was concerned, and Ruby was still my idol regardless of what happened between us, I couldn't hate him. I just couldn't.

"I'm sorry." I swirled my straw through the cola in front of me, letting the ice cubes clink together awkwardly.

Two pairs of eyes turned up then, and Ruby released the milkshake glass hesitantly, while Wally looked somewhat stunned. Ruby's eyes narrowed suspiciously.

"For what?" He asked in his gentle, but throaty voice.

"For everything." I glanced in the direction Sapphire had disappeared. We had been traveling by foot all day, and her bladder had not held up very well. I assumed I had a minute. "For chasing you out of town, for stealing Sapphire, for being an ass in general."

Wally stifled a laugh and Ruby spoke. "You can have Sapphire."

I shook my head. "No, no that's not what I mean. I don't want Sapphire." My voice reduced to a whisper, and I leaned across the table to the private bubble of the two. "Ruby I held a grudge against you for running away from the city, that's why I hated you and that's why I wanted to be with Sapphire. That and because a contract forced us to, but I don't want to be with her now and I know why you left. So I'm not mad."

"Oh well that's good." Ruby said sarcastically, though his eyes were light hearted. He glanced at Wally, who was nervous but curious.



"And I have to apologize to you too." I announced. "I'm sorry I shoved you."

He smiled lightly, revealing a small gap between his front teeth. "That's oâ€œ"

"You shoved him!?" Ruby cut him off, gaping in surprise.

Wally rolled his eyes and ignored the defensive boy at his side. "It's fine." He said to me, but Ruby's pout disagreed.

"When did this happen?" He looked at us both in shock.

Wally ignored him and went on to ask me another question. "Why so suddenly? I meanâ€œ why now?"

"What? That I'm apologizing?" My eyes flickered to the direction of the bathroom. "Becauseâ€œ sheâ€œ isn't here right now."

Ruby snorted softly, rolling his eyes. "I don't know what happened to her in the last couple monthsâ€œ she is just so unhappy. That's not the girl I grew up with."

"Wait, wait." Wally scattered out thoughts on Sapphire. It was obvious he had more important things to address. "What's the big picture here Brendan?"

"What do you mean?" I asked running a hand through my hair.

"So you don't hate us and you don't like Sapphireâ€œ thenâ€œ Why are you here?" His pale blue eyes were suddenly piercing with interest.

Ruby was skeptical of this conversation in general, let alone the fact that Sapphire was waltzing up behind him, flowing through the diner like a black wave of awkwardness. I didn't answer the question, stalling until they realized that she was right there. Wally jumped as she reached out and grabbed her glass with a clunk. She took a long swig of the ice tea before putting it down and clearing her throat.

"Can we go now?" She made no attempt to sit down. "Oh and Ruby your mother called. She's meeting us in Goldenrod city tomorrow."

Ruby, who was mid swallow coughed and choked with horror. Wally looked just as surprised, if not more mortified. The two looked up in dismay.

"What?" Ruby rasped.

"It will take longer to get to Goldenrod than one day." Wally insisted.

"Not if we travel through the night." Sapphire enquired. "There isn't that many miles between cities here. If we don't keep stopping we can make it there by late tomorrow afternoon."

"You want us to walk through the night, city to city in a region we don't even know?" I spoke up, surprised with her. I couldn't understand Ruby and Wally's repulsion, but certainly they had a right

to be concerned. "We can't just walk for twenty four hours straight." I shook my head. "Sapphire even I think that's crazy."

"Well we've got to get there by tomorrow!" She crossed her arms. "We can get on a bus if we have to."

"Eeew." Ruby groaned. Did he have something personal against buses? I looked at him carefully. They weren't so horrible; I had taken my fair share of them to work every hot and humid Summer day of my teenage life. And yet the fear in his eyes was real. There had to be another reason.

Actually it was between both of them. Wally looked pale with fright as well; a straight reminder that neither of them wanted to be here. Of course Ruby didn't have a choice, his mother never gave him the right to have a choice, but Wally surely didn't have to be here. His question seemed even more vital now, and while I looked back and forth between my three traveling partners I couldn't help but wonder.

Why was I even here?

## 9. Chapter 28

~Wally~

We had three days, two if you don't count today being pretty much over, before Ruby's birthday.

I had taken Cynthia's words to heart when she told me that it was a shame Ruby wasn't eighteen yet, and so I had asked him, out of blatant curiosity, only to find that he told me it was July twentieth. Three days away.

Such a simple solution and none of us had even thought about it. It took the simple pity from a stranger to make us realize the opportunity that lay before us. Ruby's freedom was riding on less than seventy two hours, and I understood why Sapphire was so determined to get us to Goldenrod now. If she could get Ruby's paperwork signed by his mother before then, we were screwed, but if we could keep her at bay long enough, there wouldn't be a worry in the world.

This was the first big step we had to take, and sadly it would make or break us depending on if we could indeed pull it off. The second step was what the hell I was going to get Ruby for a gift. Three days away and not one person had spoken up and said something.

"I can't believe your birthday is in three days." I whispered to Ruby. Sapphire had fallen back behind us as we walked slowly through the dirt paths, lined by farm fences and pine trees. She was keeping a sharp eye on us, making sure we didn't run away at given moment. She would surely hunt us down if we did.

Brendan was nearer to us than he was Sapphire, and the obvious wall between the two of them was making things worse at the moment, but I believed that things could work out better for us this way. Sapphire may have Ruby's mother wrapped around her finger, but there wasn't a thing she could do if Brendan decided he didn't want to be a

performer anymore. I was seriously counting on that happening, but Ruby was skeptical.

"Your birthday?" Brendan asked, taking a quicker step forward to make pace with us. He came up on my left side, opposite of Ruby who was holding my hand delicately. I actually didn't mind Brendan now that he smoothed things over with us. He was kind at heart, a little rough around the edges, but kind none the less.

"Yeahâ€|" Ruby murmured, looking crossly at me as if to transfer the disapproval. He didn't want much to do with Brendan, but that only made me feel worse for the guy. After all, he wouldn't be talking to us if he wasn't lonely.

Brendan smiled nervously. "What do you want for your birthday?"

"Yeah Ruby." I looked up at him, giving his hand a squeeze. "What in the world am I supposed to get you?"

He looked at me, words of fluff pouring out from his eyes. He wouldn't say it himself, but I could read it on his crooked smile. My heart fluttered. All he ever wanted was me. I grinned back. How lucky was I?

"You know what I want." Ruby sighed, face turning pink. Even Brendan seemed to understand at that point, he shoved his hands into his pockets awkwardly. He looked a little turned off at the way our eyes would meet and sparks would fly, but there was no resentment to us for that. Unlike Sapphire who was throwing silent curse words our way, raging over the three boys that walked together in the night.

Brendan snorted a laugh after a second, oblivious but not wanting to be left out of our bubble.

"I don't want to know." He shook his head.

"As if we would tell you anyways." Ruby smirked, which made me smile. It wouldn't have been so obvious if he would have said "I would tell you" rather than "We would tell you". Brendan scrunched up his face in mock distaste. We're all friends here; we could tease each other right?

I took a short breath, testing the air to make sure it was safe to lose track of my breathing. There were things in life that should come perfectly natural to people, and the most important one was breathing. Sad as it was, for me I had to concentrate it, however old this habit was I was never quite used to it. But on nights like tonight, while I had the time to forget about things I could also let my concentration relax. I took a deep breath. Easy, slow, complete. My lungs were clear.

"You sound good." Ruby observed calmly, which made Brendan looked over. There was a question in his eyes, but it was something he wouldn't ask on his own, perhaps trying to stay out of our bubble now.

"I have breathing problems." I explained basically. It was no secret to the world what was wrong with me, but I appreciated the way Ruby

flinched anyways.

"Ohâ€|" Brendan looked away.

"You know. Asthma and stuff." I shrugged. "It's nothing I'm not used to."

Ruby shook his head. "And chronic nose bleeds, and random passing out."

"That's your fault." I hissed at him, earning a strange look from Brendan. No need to elaborate on the way sexual tension caused me to freak out. That wasn't an illness I was used to anyways. That may not even be an illness anyways.

"That's too bad." Brendan mused, though it was obvious he didn't know how to react to such medical conditions. He wasn't pitying me, just agreeing with the palpable, and I respected that. Because when you grow up under the conditions I did, you realize the ones that pity you are the ones that don't try to understand you.

"You were born with it?" Brendan asked after a moment.

I nodded. "I've never known any other way of life."

"Hmm." Brendan mused. "I know it's not the sameâ€| but I grew up in poverty. Dirt poor since the day I was bornâ€"no, conceived." He rolled his eyes. "My asshole runaway father never supported me or my mother."

Ruby leaned forward to look at the near identical boy who had strangely different emerald eyes. There was lightness to his eyes this time. "My father ran off tooâ€| when I was very young. Of courseâ€| I wasâ€"well. You know." Ruby let it go. What would that say on his part if he pointed out the obvious? We all knew he was filthy rich.

Strangely I was suddenly the one that felt indifferent to them, not meaning to of course. My father was a hard working man that loved life and family more than anything else. It killed him to see me leave for Verdanturf when I was very young, and he was saddened by guilt every now and again, thinking that it was his fault I had the illnesses I did. Which was completely irrational. Just because asthma came from his side of the family didn't mean anything. I loved my father, strangely enough, I never talked to him, but I loved him.

"I was lucky to have a mother like I did." Brendan mused. "I know you didn't get so lucky."

Ruby snorted a laugh. "Personally I think the devil made a fantastic mother. You know, she didn't try to burn me or skin me or anything." The sarcasm in his voice made me smile.

"But somewhere inside her I'm sure she loves you." Brendan said, as if it was even a question. I nearly flinched in sadness, especially when Ruby shook his head in disagreement.

"She loves what I do." He said calmly as I sounded talking about my illnesses. "Nothing more, nothing less."

How sad! my mother also loved me very much, and tried to call me as often as she could, however work in a different region made it difficult for her. I was disappointed in the way city people lived, or at least Ruby's mother did. There was no love in their families, it was all business and that brought fret to my heart.

I realized then that Ruby, Brendan and I were all very alike, but also very different. I was raised on love and sickness, I fought harder mentally than either of them probably ever dreamed of. Not to mention the will power, the courage it took to overcome the dog days in which I spent feeling sorry for myself. I had all the support in the world, and yet it was in the end, me that had to come through. My suffering was personal, silent as a memory now, and just as heartfelt.

Brendan on the other hand, was outspoken, courageous in a different kind of way. He was bold, headstrong in the way he walked. But most of all he was very, very proud. I could see it in his eyes when he talked about his father walking out on him, or how he was poor. They seemed to intimidate those of weaker souls, and I knew the feeling well, though I couldn't display it like he could. Brendan seemed to dare the world to question him, and then see what would happen.

Then there was Ruby, who had spent far more of his life feeling unloved and rejected than me or Brendan. Ruby had all the luxuries in life, money, popularity, fans, glory; unlike Brendan who had none. However, Brendan had grown up with a backbone, and I had grown up with a backbone (crooked from scoliosis, but a backbone none the less). Ruby did not have that support he needed through the years of growing; all he had was expectation to fill, shoes too big for his feet, and that made me feel utterly sorry for him.

Silence drew on while we walked down the dirt path, listening to Sapphire's impatiently slow steps behind us. She had drifted closer, perhaps trying to hear our conversation, or fearing the sounds of wild pokemon snuffling through the brush. She was a good ten feet behind still, and I doubted she would come any closer, but she still seemed ready to interrupt us. This was the first time I actually felt sorry for Sapphire.

Not sorry enough to do anything about it, but sorry enough to sigh slightly. What was her story? Had she grown up with a mother like Ruby's, or a father like Brendan's? Had she ever given her expectations a second thought? Or did she even have the expectations Ruby did? I didn't know much about Sapphire, but I knew that she had plenty of chances to prove herself friend worthy. Of all the things she had done to Ruby lately, it was impossible just to accept her, but my much too spacious heart proclaimed otherwise. I had to look over at Ruby to assure myself this was doing the right thing. Sapphire didn't deserve our pity.

"Hey! Did you hear that?" Brendan stopped suddenly, in his tracks and whirling around.

Me and Ruby came to a halt, our sweaty palms detaching as he moved to wipe them simultaneously on our pockets. I blushed because I knew it was my hand that got clammy, not his.

"What?" Sapphire demanded, obviously prickling with annoyance at our sudden stop. We were all looking in her direction, so I could imagine

how daunting it was.

"Shhâ€|" Ruby hissed. That time we all heard it. A distinct rumbling noise. It sent a chill up my spine, and for the first time I felt the sudden effects of fear. Normally things didn't surprise me easilyâ€"I had been through too much long term dread for thatâ€"but this time it seemed to hit a nerve. I stepped closer to Ruby, instinctively reaching for a pokeball at my belt. Gardevoir was the strongest pokemon on my team, and she was the most cautious.

The sound of Brendan's own pokeball growing made us grow silent. The whole region seemed to stop what it was doing and wait. All but a sudden snarl that shook us to the core. Ruby reached out and gripped my elbow protectively.

"Guâ€"guys." Sapphire whimpered, ten feet away and shrinking within herself. The hostility in her eyes turned to pleading as whatever obvious threat was signaling her out from the group of us three.

We all held our breath, even me who found it painful to do so.

And then all hell broke loose.

â€|

~Ruby~

"Gardevoir!"

"Sceptile!"

"Heartbreak!"

"AAAAAIIIIHHHHHHH!"

Sapphire screeched in fear as lanky shadow shot out from the bushes and lunged at her. It howled, baying into the night while its midnight horns curved back in the thick arch. My first instinct was the grab Wally and run, turn heels and get the hell out of there, but I couldn't just leave Sapphireâ€"no matter how much wrong she had done to meâ€"and Brendan was innocent as well. As much as I hated to admit it, these were my traveling companions now, and I felt somewhat responsible for what happened to them.

Heartbreak, my largest, slowest, beefiest pokemon on my team groaned to life, sending a way of water out across the dirt path almost instantly. He was loud and lagging, so attack and defense was the majority of his fighting style, unlike the new figure in front of me.

Sceptile, an unexpected turn of events had lead Brendan to release what could only be his starter pokemon. It made no sound, but vanished in an instant, blindingly fast and lashing out at the nearest victim.

A whole pack of demons seemed to rain over us, barking and snarling and howling like scourges into the night. They all had extremely long spider-like legs, and lean muscles in which scars had revealed beneath their coarse black fur.

"Gardevoir!" Wally gasped from beside me, hand clutching so tightly at my belt his knuckles were white. He wouldn't let me move an inch further from him.

"Sceptile!" Brendan yelled in his own barking fashion. Lithe shapes ran back and forth, circling us and Sapphire who was quivering on the ground, struck by the initial blow of the group's leader. I could smell the blood from here, and it made my stomach flip with horror.

She was my best friend— She may not be now, and we may have had a rough time the last few months, but she suddenly still meant something to me. As a memory maybe, or as a stranger I didn't hate, but simply didn't understand. I couldn't watch her crumble to the ground in pain and bleed out. I just couldn't.

"Heartbreak, surf now!" I ordered, but his building wave was too slow.

The Houndoom raced between the trees, swerving, yapping, nipping at each other as they all came to their leaders side. The night grew hotter as their immense body heat clumped together. And as I noticed, while trying to forgive myself for not rushing over to Sapphire, they all seemed to raise their heads in unison. The moon hid beyond a cloud on this fretful night, but it was not the lack of light that worried me. It was the sudden, intense burning of light from the muzzles of about twenty Houndoom that made me tremble.

They all through their heads back, mouths open wide to reveal fire balls in the back of their throats. Half of them were directed at Sapphire, half of them were pointed aimlessly at the three pokemon trying to fend them off, which also pointed our way. I reached back to grip Wally tighter, placing my broad shoulders between him and the pokemon's attacks.

I realized then however, that Wally's Gardevoir was just beside us, her slender arms stretched out wide and her tiny fingers crooked with tension. Her eyes were narrowed, her head tilted down in concentration as she protected us with a glorious green bubble that glittered with a thousand stars. I almost took a moment to stop and bask in its glory, but by attention was drawn elsewhere when a single, rogue Houndour decided to take a snap at us. Brendan, Wally, and I all jolted back with surprise, but the young dog was no match for Gardevoir's forcefield strength. It merely bounced off, sending embers flying across the ground uncontrollably only to be met by the slash from Sceptile.

Brendan's pokemon was too fast to be hit by any fire attacks, it was zipping like flashes of green lightning through the pack, lashing out at one after another, angering them in the only way it could. The attack was not enough to send them running, but enough to make their eyes blaze with hate. Demon pokemon— that's what they were.

Heartbreak unleashed then, sending a grueling wave across the path we walked and flooding the base of nearby pines. Every long legged, black as night, savage pokemon before us was struck, along with Sapphire who was curled up within herself. She was clutching at her arm as the water washed away her tears from our sight. Howls of

protest went up in horror as the demons realized that they had made a mistake in pursuing a trainer as prey. I searched desperately for Sapphire, watching the agonized pokemon as they started to dash nimbly back and forth, smoke puffing out of their nostrils.

Heartbreak slammed a mighty back leg down to shake the ground and send them all fleeing for their lives. Water and ground attacks were obviously the trick when fighting fire types. Everyone knew that, but I had never had to actually use it as a technique before. I was more proud of my pokemon now than I had been in quite some time.

"All ok?" Brendan asked as the final group of hounds left the battlefield.

I turned, gave Wally a careful look. He was breathing very harshly, but it was nothing compared to the way Sapphire was slumped over shaking a little ways away. I gripped the sides of his head quickly and planted a kiss before turning and stumbling through the force field that was now submitting. Gardevoir cooed as it flickered away, proud of herself for protecting her master and his friends.

"Sapphire?" I ran to her side and dropped down instantly.  
"Sapph?"

She coughed at the sound of her name, her sopping head lolling with dizziness. Heartbreak groaned from behind me, obviously unaware of the severity of his attack on a human. Sapphire looked waterlogged and half drowned. Her face turned up slightly, ocean eyes red with pain as blood trickled from a series of teeth marks on her left arm.

"Ruby." Her hand twitched, and I couldn't tell if it was an attempt to reach out to me or not. She closed her eyes, letting a tear slither down her high cheek bone and past her lips. Her voice was rough and wounded, longing. I actually felt terrible for her, in that long moment where I forgot everything that she had said and done. Yes, if only for a moment, she was not the girl that helped ruin my life, but she was my childhood best friend again, telling me secrets and teasing me in the damp darkness of the studio basement.

I swallowed hard as she spoke; making my heart ache while her words proclaimed weakness she had been trying to hide for so long. I shook my head at her slowly, knowing it was too late for the truth, but embracing it like anything else.

"I miss us." She whispered before drowning in an unconscious suffering.

## 10. Chapter 29

~Wally~

Brendan apparently knew how to do just about everything. He could bandage an arm, pull medication out who knows where, and make Sapphire feel better with just the touch of his hands. However, when it came to directions he was about as bright as a two watt bulb.



"Where the hell are we?!" Ruby hissed, pulling his face away from where it was lying against my back. Salamence was big enough for me and him to sit on together and Brendan's Altariaâ€"though it struggledâ€"would have to do. Cattivo was too lithe for more than one person, it imbalanced him.

"Iâ€"I don't know." Brendan admitted, hand atop a new pokemon's head while it perched itself in his lap. He had caught the dimwitted Houndour after it knocked itself out on Gardevoir's force field. The young mutt looked happy as hell with its pink tongue lolling and its black eyes shining. Brendan had made sure to use a potion on it before we took flight, so it befriended him instantly.

"That's not Goldenrod down there!" Sapphire yelled to us, though the fire was still deflated from her eyes. She lookedâ€"tired. That was the only explanation for her dark circles and lack of real anger.

"We have to land!" Brendan insisted, ushering his Altaria towards the ground. "Altaria won't last much longer!"

The town below us was all monochromatic, ranging in different shades of brown and grey-blue, but nothing unnaturally bright. Large trees lined the north end of it where a tower stood stretching up into the dawn sky. Sunlight cracked over the horizon, making the leaves of orange burn like a flame. I yawned awkwardly, shaking myself to keep from passing out from exhaustion. Who's idea was it to travel through the night again? The one whose arm almost got ripped offâ€"right.

Ruby was already dozing behind me, head lolling until I squeezed his hand tightly and made him jolt awake. The last thing we needed was for him to fall asleep and slip off of Salamence. This was the first time I really noticed how lack of sleep affected him. Ruby just couldn't handle it. He was grumpyâ€"to say the least.

The town was dead asleep when we made the ground shake with our landing. Altaria was gentle and smooth with hers, but Salamence made a big enough rumble to awaken the people in the nearest houses. Not to mention he snorted and slobbered with excitement to feel his feet on the ground. I happened to notice that Brendan's new addition had the same mentality as my big oaf of a pokemon.

"Get off Ruby." I jostled around and he dragged himself away from me, limp and groaning.

"Where's a hotel?" His eyes were half lidded.

"What about Goldenrod?" Sapphire mumbled.

"Fuck Goldenrod."

Under any other circumstances I may have elbowed Ruby for using such language. But he had a point. This was getting ridiculous.

"Ruby's right, Sapphire. We have to rest." Brendan agreed, calling back his Altaria into her ball and picking up the overzealous Houndour. Its bounteous energy never seemed to cease.

She crossed her arms and flinched at the bandages over the left one, eyes flickering between Ruby and Brendan, and then finally settling on me. I blinked in confusion as she stared me down, obvious hate making her silent with rage. As if this was all my fault I looked away sharply.

"Hello! New comers! Travelers! Uninformed misfits!"

All of our lagging attention turned to the voice of a man. I turned up a weak but polite smile, while everyone else seemed to scowl in distaste. The sunshiny atmosphere drifted right over our heads as a man with a short white cape and slicked back brown hair approached us. Followed by a very disgruntled looking blond with wild locks and a headband pushing then upwards. He adjusted the thing as he came over.

"Forgive him. He never realizes how early it really is." The blond pushed his partner aside and stuck out his slender hand. I was the only one who made an attempt to shake it. "I'm Morty."

"Wally." I said. "Um can you tell us where we could go to get a hotel room? Or where the pokemon center is?"

"What is this magnificent?" The louder of the two said. He was standing up to my Salamence holding out his white gloved hands and scratching the pokemon under the jaw with a big goofy smile on his face. "It must be rare?" He turned to look at our group; not knowing who it belonged to. On that note a glob of drool fell and slapped him in the foot. He looked pleased.

"Salamence." I shrugged. "I guess he's not common."

"Are you guy's travelers?" Morty took my attention again. He looked past me at Ruby, Brendan and Sapphire. "You look familiar you three, have we maybe battled before?"

"We are performers." Sapphire said in her voice, reflecting a snippet of arrogance despite her injuries. "Ruby and Sapphire." She gestured back and forth.

"And Brendan." The taller raven haired boy added awkwardly, scowling at her for not including him.

"Listen. I don't mean to be rude." Ruby stepped forward, holding his hands upward at the blond who was quite a bit taller than him. "But we all just got into a fight in the forest with a pack of Houndoom. We aren't exactly in the mood to chat. Can you please just show us the pokecenter?"

"Well sure." Morty looked a little hesitant; and who wouldn't? Looking into Ruby's maroon eyes wasn't exactly easy the first time around. "The pokecenter is on the next street over. But they don't have rooms there for you to stay."

Ruby groaned and hung his head over my shoulder in dismay. I smiled nervously. "Is there any place we can stay?"

"With us of course!" The eccentric one left my Salamence alone then and came over. His purple suit was wet with drool, which made me wonder what he did to my pokemon to cause such salivation. I curled

my lip at the grossness of it all. It looked as if he slicked his hair back with the thick saliva.

"Oh no, no." Brendan disagreed instantly, while Ruby refused to pull himself from leaning on me.

"We can't stop and rest here anyways!" Sapphire insisted. "Let's just go. Can you tell us how to get to Goldenrod?"

"I'm Eusine." The drool covered man stuck his gloved hand out to Sapphire. "And you look too much like hell to travel to Goldenrod, so stay a while ok? We have many rooms in our house."

"What do you mean "we"?" Sapphire eyed them suspiciously.

They both looked hurt by her comment. "I don't recall gay marriage IS legal here right Morty?" Eusine asked his partner with a pout.

"Of course it is." Morty's eyes narrowed at the rude girl. I didn't blame him. "It's legal everywhere except Hoenn and Sinnoh."

It's illegal in Hoenn? My heart sank as me and Ruby glanced at each other, and then blushed furiously. That was a topic we couldn't even begin to think about at the moment. Surely one day but not today, he seemed to speak the same words to me with his strong hand that gripped mine.

"Thank you." Brendan ignored Sapphire. "That's kind. We'll take it."

Eusine perked up slightly, his slicked back hair glinting in the early sun. Very few stars still dotted the sky in the north, and I noticed now that the street lamps turned off. Our sleeping schedule would be completely messed up.

"You are welcome." Morty inclined specifically at Brendan and then me. His pale purple eyes darted toward Ruby, as if he was still trying to figure out the familiar face, but he nodded to him as well. No one acknowledged Sapphire any further as we turned to follow the two strange guys back towards what seemed to be a small mansion. Though it blended in well with the tower at the far side of the town, I couldn't tell exactly what was what.

I called Salamence back into his pokeball after his heavy feet seemed too loud for the early morning, which made Eusine turn to me and smile before slipping his hand into Morty's back pocket artfully. I blinked, walking with Ruby was one of the few things that had made itself simple for me, but I suddenly had to desire to reach out and make my heart jump by touching his backside like that. I envied Eusine's sleazy touch, knowing that I could never pull something like that off. My eyes narrowed.

But why not try? Ruby was mine.

I slid my arm around, carefully dislodging it from his fingers and looking away as I searched for the pocket closest to me. Ruby chuckled tiredly as I fished, trying to be smooth, but failing miserably and pulling my hand away before I could give myself a decent chance. It was obvious I was trying to fit the couple imagine

when Morty and Eusine were walking ahead of us, so I flushed terribly.

"You meant to do this." Ruby hooked his arm around me and reached for my furthest pocket. He tucked me into his side expertly and slid his hand down. He kneaded my right cheek slightly before finding the pocket and pushing it in deep. I shivered. Now why couldn't I do that?

"You two are contagious." Brendan snorted as he passed us, eager to get into the extra rooms of Morty and Eusine's house. Ruby and I both flushed. What did he mean by that?

"Our home." Morty turned to us and gestured up the porch to a pair of grand wooden doors. "Attached to the one and only haunted Bell Tower. If you here noise at night, don't worry though. It's probably just us."

I didn't miss the way Brendan shook his head at that comment, trying not to laugh and slapping himself in the forehead with his palm. Sapphire folded her arms and snarled with her eyes at the two. Did she have something against gays? Or did she just hate everyone? I couldn't be sure.

"Or us." Ruby snickered as we were let in to the small mansion. What happened to him being so exhausted he could hardly stand? I rolled my eyes at him and received a tight squeeze to my butt in return.

"I know you guys are all tired, so just go ahead downâ€¦" Morty ushered us past a very rural looking entryway. "This corridor. Towards the end you will see open doors and feel free to stay in any of the rooms. We let a lot of people stay in them while they come to the town to visit, so it's no worry. But if the door's are closed don't go in! We have otherâ€¦ rather rambunctious guests staying."

"Thanks again." I nodded as the two broke away from us.

"Bathrooms are upstairs." Eusine added. "Whenever you are rested you can find us. We will be around."

I wasn't sure I completely understood those two, but I knew that I liked them just the same. Whoever had this much space to give and was nice enough to give it to guests in need, well that made me feel good. It didn't seem as if this old one toned town had any city attitude, which made me happy.

The four of us headed down the corridor carefully, watching the few closed doors turn into open ones that revealed dark and cool rooms with large covered windows. You couldn't even tell that it was turning to daylight at the moment, and that was perfect. Ruby seemed to melt at the sight of a clean bed, and I couldn't help but match his sluggish enthusiasm.

"Called it." Brendan pushed his way by us into the closest open door and entered a single bed room that was slightly smaller than the one we weaved our way into. Sapphire was left to scrambler for the room at the furthest end of the hall on her own. Her shoulders dropped as she did so.

"Hey Ruby?" I asked quietly, shutting the door as we went into a room. He shed his backpack instantly and pulled off his black T-shirt in the same movement.

"Yeah?" he murmured, undoing his belt.

"Do you feel bad for Sapphire?"

He stopped, letting his hands limp at his sides and turning to look back at me. His muscles rippling as he went. The question obviously caught him off guard.

"I want to..." His face twisted awkwardly. "I really do want to feel bad for her, but the thing is... even if I do it won't make a difference. I've known her my whole life and she's never changed. Not once, so there's no hope anymore. I've given up on her."

I nodded. It wasn't my place to say any more about their friendship, or what was their friendship, so I held my tongue. I wished I could tell Ruby that Sapphire just looked lonely, but that was wrong as well. She had her chance and Ruby was right, she never changed. I sighed and made my way over to the shirtless boy, reaching out to him while he sat on the edge of the bed.

His arms wrapped around me tightly as I snagged his hat off his head and threw it down on the bed beside him. It had been far too long since we had time alone together—"two whole days"—and despite being dead on our feet, we still had a strange needing to be close. He gripped the ends of my shirt and lifted them slowly to reveal the flat planes of my stomach. It was like the last time he had kissed me there, minus the licking and biting, and yet it still made me shiver.

"Mnnnn." Ruby moaned. "Stop it, will you? A little control over your cuteness?"

I blushed furiously, running my hands through the hair that had been shielded from his hat all day. I pushed it back and fluffed it up with my fingers, brushing short locks back behind his ears and willing myself to stay calm. The last two days had given us time to get comfortable with each other in public, and now I knew it was time to get comfortable with each other in private. My heart raced.

"Mmm... I want to treat you like my baby." He straightened himself, showing that secret side of him that I could imagine only I had ever seen. Ruby was not so fluffy in public when I first met him. Actually he was very hard and critical of everyone, and now it seemed he was showing this softer side that made my heart melt. Was that because of me, or was I just extremely lucky?

"Don't pass out on me again." His hands snaked their way up my back until I was lodged between an iron grasp. He leaned me back on the bed with him, our hips pressing together and everything between my legs tightening and contracting to the emotions.

"No... no I was too tired for this."

"No nosebleeds..." Ruby whispered, tilting my chin down to kiss me. It was soft, gentle, and tasting of fresh dirt from the outside world

(which wasn't unpleasant). My lungs were in my throat already, but I wasn't focusing on it.

"Breathe easy." He pulled away after swiping his tongue across my lower lip. I sniffed attentively. Sinuses clear, which meant there were no current nose bleeds. However I was panicky with this air.

"Whatâ€"what â€"are weâ€"doing" I murmured as he shifted me to the side of him, pulling himself up on the bed and then reaching back down for me. I met him halfway, army crawling up to his side and putting my arm around his neck.

"Whatever you want." Ruby kissed me again.

"Do you knowâ€" what I want?" I whispered, feeling somewhat bad, but also assured.

Ruby shook his head.

I had to smile sheepishly at him, even though it probably looked awkward and forced. "Aâ€"a good six hoursâ€" Of sleepâ€"

His shoulders sagged.

"And thenâ€" I took a deep breath, mentally preparing myself. I breathed better when I sleptâ€" so waking up with a good start would be the key. "Then weâ€" we canâ€"

Ruby grinned softly. "You're going to make me wait?"

I nodded.

"Then you're going to get it all."

â€".

"Cynthia?" I whispered frantically five and half hours later, fearing that Ruby's mental clock would go off and wake him up. I had retreated from his arms carefully and found myself in the upstairs bathroom, grateful for whoever decided that a wall phone belonged in the bathroom to begin with. I had memorized Cynthia's number by heart, fearing that Ruby would rip of the paper I wrote it down on out of jealousy.

"Wally?" She asked in a muted voice. "Oh hey! How are you?"

I held my stomach tightly, wrapping myself up nervously. It seemed as though now that I had the time to think about it (and dream about it for short periods at a time) I realized that I was absolutely innocent and unsure of myself.

"Cynthiaâ€" I nearly whimpered. "Iâ€"I don't know what to doâ€" Ruby wants toâ€" you know."

"Ow Ow!" She hooted. "That's what iâ€"Hold please."

There was at least two other muffled voices in the background, bickering back and forth while I tried to hold myself together.

"Sorry hun." A sudden pant came. The phone shuffled against material for a second. "Wally, Lance doesn't think its polite to talk on the phone while having sexâ€¦ but I think its impolite not to answer the phone when a friend calls you."

"Youâ€¦you're having?!" My jaw dropped. Oh the irony!

"Are you ok?" She asked me. "You sound upset."

"Ruby wants to haveâ€¦ sex I think." I gripped the counter awkwardly. "Butâ€¦Iâ€¦How?"

"What do you mean?" she asked. "Go for it Wally! I don't understand why you are worried."

Of course Cynthia didn't know about my medical conditions, but that was something I could sort out on my own. What I couldn't gather was exactly HOW we would have sex. Ruby seemed so confident with itâ€¦ he knew this kind of stuff obviously, and was unfazed. Butâ€¦ the way he spoke it sounded like he would actually be able to physically haveâ€¦ sex with me.

"How? Cynthia how do two guys have sex?" I begged.

She laughed a high pitched laugh on the other end of the phone. "Oh Wally. Trust meâ€¦ you will be fine."

"That wasn't the question!"

"Ohâ€¦ Lanceâ€¦"

"Cynthia!"

"Wally justâ€¦ whatever happens goâ€¦oh- OHâ€¦. With it. Ok?"

I flinched at the obvious moaning from the other line. Someone was grunting with effort, someone very large too from the sounds of it. I also noticed a second, shorter huff of who would be a third person to their party. Three people? I shivered. I could barely handle oneâ€¦actually no. I couldn't handle one.

"Have funâ€¦" Cynthia gasped. "Call me later!"

With that I put the phone back on the hook and sank to the ground in worry. What was this hidden secret that no one wanted me to know? Two guys couldn't have sex like a man and women could. It was impossible unless we had a hidden vagina I had never heard about before; and I was pretty sure I would have noticed that at some point in my life. I was no stranger to anatomy, so what could I be missing? Even Cynthia seemed to know, and she wasn't even a guy!

I hid my face in my hands for a short amount of time, concentrating on my breathingâ€¦which was loud but smooth in and out. I let it calm me. At least I was right about something; after waking up from being asleep it was easier to breathe. Plus the air in this small town was pretty clean.

But how would I be when I went downstairs into that room to meet Ruby? What would I do when I had to look his arousal in the face and

know that it was because of me? What would I do when he looked mine in the face and knew it belonged to him and only him? I took a strong breath; as strong as I could to give myself courage.

I didn't know what would happen down thereâ€¦ but one thing was for certain. No matter how nervous I was, I knew that I wanted it.

## 11. Chapter 30

~Ruby~

I awoke to a pair of tender thin lips pressing against mine. Slender shoulders blocked the mid day light from touching my eyelids, and I wasn't quite coherent enough to realize that whomever was disturbing me was exactly who I wanted it to be. I squirmed with lidded eyes, not fighting with any real strength, but trying to find a pillow to shove my face into and fall back to sleep.

"Ruby." A soft, nervous voice brought me to reality, along with the bare slender hands that ran over my face. My eyes opened, and were met fruitfully with a pair of pale blue ones.

I remembered then, almost instantly, about the deal we had made before passing out together for six hours of sleep. Had it been that long? I felt like I had just closed my eyes, and yet there was a new strength in my body that claimed rested. I smiled at Wally, wondering when I had gotten so lucky as to find someone that complimented me so well.

"Iâ€¦"If you want to sleep moreâ€¦" He began, but it was obvious he wasn't hopeful. He had stripped himself of his shirt to reveal the pale planes of his chest as well as the flat lines of his stomach. Wally did not have the tight, compact muscles that I did over my body, but more so long and lean ones that barely broke the surface. Even so, I could easy make out the shapes of his small abs, and his ribs were like small ripples across his sides.

"I can sleep laterâ€¦" I said in a croaky voice, scanning his face. He was obviously nervous, swallowing and focusing on his breathing while he could. "Are you ok?" I pulled my arm up and brushed his hair back.

He nodded, but said nothing to reassure me.

"We'll take it slow." I whispered, shifting so that I was propped up on my elbow and he was at my side. Wally didn't need to know my intentions, and I would keep that promise to him, but there was a part of me that insisted on being devilish. It was a feral dominance that seemed to be getting in the way of my common sense lately, and I knew it wanted nothing more than to make Wally moan. I shivered, tilting my face into his and prying his mouth open. Oh how I wanted to hear him moanâ€¦

I slid my tongue into his mouth carefully, gliding past his lower lip until it snagged with his and proceeded to stroke in the same fashion I would stroke him. Naturally, however, I had to let him breathe, so our kisses were short and passionate. I nipped at his lower lip before pulling away and turning so that I was pushing down on him. Dominance at its finest. He succumbed under me, eyes closed with a



dribble of spit down his chin.

"You're breathingâ€|" I commented.

"Clear." He huffed, though sounding quite choked.

I looked down him, scanning the fragile figure while I had the patients. He had left me with a pair of jeans to strip him from, the belt was already undone, and beneath that a pair of grey boxers that would uncover a whole new world of Wally's I had never seen before. I felt myself tingling at the thought, which lead me to throw my leg over his other side carefully. I pulled my shirt off in one swift movement and tossed it to the floor next to my lonely hat.

Wally's eyes shimmered as he took in my opposite body type, strong and bold and unafraid. Gently his hand came up, carefully to place it at my chest, centered just above my heart.

"You're not afraidâ€|" He whispered, assuming because my heartbeat was completely calm.

I smiled at him. "You shouldn't be afraid either."

"How can I not?" he let his hand slide up to my jaw.

"I love you." Was all I said to him before dipping my head to kiss his neck. I loved him and he knew that, he trusted me enough to let me do this so a hoped he would trust me enough not to harm him either. He repeated the words softly, allowing the shower of kisses to unfold around the fear. I could caress him, make him my baby and make him know that I'd protect him, but of course that borderline obsession told me otherwise.

Make him moanâ€|

"Mmmn.." I grunted softly, working my way down his chest and past his stomach. I had noticed that this was the area in which he grew most sensitive. Just below his belly button where a faint line of hair was soft and fresh and alluring me downwards.

"Yoâ€"you first." Wally hissed as my hands fell on his hips.

"Only if you strip me." I commented.

He said nothing at first, taking into consideration. Wouldn't he feel empowered to hold something so sensitive in his hands? The look on his face said otherwise, but he nodded in agreement anyways.

So I straightened up, leaning over him and raising my hips so that his shaky hands could reach the button and zipper centered over my bulging crotch. His fingers seemed to have trouble touching the jean material, let alone what lie under it, and the look of embarrassment on his face made me want to kiss him. He couldn't look at me, and while he tried to breathe so easily and fumble with my button at the same time, his pale eyes glossed over with the start of frustrated tears.

I pinned his hands down beside us, unable to stand him in such a state. No one should be this nervous about having sex.

"It's ok." I kissed him on the forehead and started unzipping and yanking the material off of myself. Wally shook his head, disappointed in himself but relieved none the less. "You'll get used to it." I commented as the air suddenly felt chilly beneath my stomach. Surprisingly it was Wally was shivered though, not me.

I lay my naked self on top of him, sprawling out and trying to make him feel secure. This was so new to us both, and yet it seemed he had all the bad emotions it came with. I was high as a kite, happy to spread my legs (and balls) across his hips and kiss him while an erection grew tighter and tighter between us. Who knows, I may have already pre-cummed by now, and yet Wally looked about ready to pass out.

"It's okâ€|" I whispered in his ear, lying perfectly still. I could feel the head of my dick probing at his stomach while it was smothered between us. "Wallyâ€| listen to me. It's ok."

His nails dug into my back and he nodded stiffly.

"Iâ€|"I love you." He spluttered beneath me. "Gâ€|"goâ€|"ahead."

I rewound the motions in my head before pulling off of him and kissing at his chest. Gentle feather light kisses that made him tremble. I made my way down again for the second time and brought my hands with me. I couldn't afford to waste any time now; my teeth gripped the zipper of his jeans and pulled down smoothly while my hands undid the tight little button. Wally gasped, hips rising to meet me while I tugged them down and buried my face into his grey cotton boxers.

My head was suddenly spinning with lust, my hips rolling naturally, humping the air while Wally panted ahead of me. I had never seen his dick before, and even now I couldn't believe what was happening. I let my warm hand massage the obvious swelling between his legs, eyeing that patch of soft honeydew green fluff that pointed down under the boxers.

Didn't he realize how attractive he was? I kissed below his belly button while I thought. His small features and long eyelashes, skinny and lean muscles, that patch of perfect soft hair between his hips. On anyone else it would be coarse and curly and unattractive, but he was different. Where had he been hiding himself for my whole life? I felt like the luckiest man on earth when he breathed steady enough to let me move on.

It was a moment of reckoning as I slipped the material down, my eyes boring into his slender shape while he whimpered with arousal. I hiked myself up higher on him as I revealed perhaps theâ€| cutestâ€| boner I had ever seen. Not that I had ever seen any besides my ownâ€|"and the few that harassed my unblocked internet pagesâ€|"but I couldn't help but, of all things, smile. It was not a lustful, seductive grin that would turn you on. No, it was a pathetic, sheepish, try-not-laugh-because-Wally-would-cry, smirk. I had to hide my face from him as I faced the fact that Wally was by all means petite in size.

"Iâ€|"I hate you!" Wally flushed, for I was bad at concealing. It was such a lie I had to laugh.

"Stâ€"stop la-laughing!"

"Awâ€|. Baby." I teased him, looking up with pleading eyes. He bit his lip in response. "It's perfect for me."

He gritted his teeth and looked away, one hand on his chest and one elbow down to prop himself up. I could see how someone like him would be self conscious about his privates. He already had so many thing to worry about, I would be pretty upset if my dick was one of them too. But that was no reason for him not to believe me when I said it was perfect.

"I love you just the same." I insisted, my fingertips playing in the soft hair. I could see him trying not to let on to it. His mouth was shut tight, eyes straining andâ€| somewhat hurt.

"Stâ€"stop." He whispered.

But there was no way I was stopping. Not now. If anything stopping would only make him feel worse. I shook my head at him and let my fingertips curl around the base of his small erection. His skin was soft, go figure, and it made me hot with desire.

"Ruâ€"Ruby! Nâ€"noâ€"no!" His hand came up, touching beneath his nose to check for blood. There was nothing there, though I could tell his breathing was becoming harder. A rasp.

My fingers started to glide up and down, pumping the gentle shape with my thumb threatening to reach up and curl on top of the sensitive head. It jolted beneath me and for a second I was sure my sanity would be lost. Wally's hand gripped a fistful of hair hard as he tried to hold on.

"Stoâ€"stop! No!"

I wasn't sure what had gotten into me, or how I could be so selfish as to want more of him than he could give. But my hand moved faster, twice up and down and then across his balls to spread his ass. Without even looking I pushed against his hole with two fingers. My mind was lost as I leaned down; ignoring Wally's gasping and put my mouth over the tip of his erection.

"RUBY!" Wally yanked his hand back, ripping out a fair piece of my hair and throwing his head back. He grew absolutely stiff, and though I reacted then at the sudden pain on my scalp, my face was not nearly far enough away for the moment.

He came.

>Hot and slimy and fast it shot up past my jaw and gathered on my cheek before a second burst sent a trickle across my forehead and dripping down the bridge of my nose. I flinched, too surprised to pull away. My face was showered; beads of white liquid gathering on even my lashes and making me squeeze my eyes shut. Wally tore himself away from me, scrambling back up to bed and leaving my bare ass naked self to wipe the cum from my face.<p>

I couldn't exactly speak, but I knew that whatever just happenedâ€"I was still in shockâ€"had not been unpleasant. Not in the slightest actually. For a second I considered gathering the liquid on my finger and tasting it, but was too distracted by the sudden hysterics. I

smashed my face into the comforter and left the white stains to whomever cleaned this place, before crawling back up the bed to Wally.

He was curled up in a ball against the headboard crying. My stomach flipped uncomfortably, and what had happened in a second deflated in a second. I went limp with panic, thinking that he was mad at me for not stopping when he asked the first time. I reached out to him, afraid he would push me away, and sighing when his slender shoulders wove their way into my torso.

"I- I- I'm Sâ€"Soâ€"Sorry." He begged, face aflame with humiliation.

I held him tightly as he chugged on air and coughed, gripping my collar bone with his hand and whimpering things about it being "unfair" and how it was "impossible". I even heard him say something about hating himself at one point, which made me kiss his cheek and hug him tighter.

"Iâ€"I'm soâ€"sorry." Wally coughed again, this time lifting his head, not sure whether to smear the blood on my chest or leave it. I hadn't even noticed his nose was bleeding all over me until now. Either way he couldn't seem to pull back, and I wouldn't let him anyways, but it was still a little disgruntling. What would Eusine and Morty think we did in their room? Surely they would be fine with us having sex, but this was beginning to look like rape and murder. I would have to explain it to them later before we left.

"It's ok." I stroked his back gently.

"Iâ€"I caâ€"coulâ€"couldn't conâ€"troll myâ€"myself." Wally sobbed.

"It's OK." I insisted, rolling my eyes. "You are supposed to cum during sex you knowâ€" Maybe notâ€" that soon, butâ€"

"Weâ€"we didâ€"int even haâ€"have seâ€"sex." Wally argued pathetically, hiding his face. "Wâ€"we caâ€"cant haâ€"have sex anyâ€"ways"

"Says who?" I pushed his hair out of his eyes in hopes that he would look at me.

"Weâ€"we're guys." Wally pointed out the obvious. "Iâ€"it's not seâ€"sex withâ€"out a woâ€"women's boâ€"body."

I stared blankly down at him in awe. I knew Wally was innocent but never in a million years had I thought he was this sheltered. It was almost funny actuallyâ€"except for the fact that he was crying right nowâ€"to think that Wally didn't even know about anal sex.

"Wallyâ€" I said softly, still trying to get him to look at me. "We can have sexâ€" I wasn't going to lie, this was terribly awkward, however I knew if anyone should tell him it should be me. But how do you explain buttsex to an eighteen year old sickly boy bleeding all over your chest?

"Hâ€"how?" He demanded, finally meeting my eyes. His face was smeared

with blood but he couldn't let it bother him any further.

"Youâ€"take itâ€" up yourâ€"

A sudden slamming on the bedroom door jolted us from the conversation. Both our hearts were suddenly racing then, making us wide eyed and clutching at the blanket as if someone would walk in and see us. The door was locked of course, but it could have been Morty or Eusine who would surely have a spare key.

"Get up you two!" It was Brendan's voice behind the door. "Sapphire's gone!"

## 12. Chapter 31

~Wally~

What the hellâ€"pardon my languageâ€"but what the HELL had I been thinking?

Of course I knew that I hadn't really been thinking at all, and that between trying to breathe and trying not toâ€"explodeâ€" I was by all means incapable of understanding. Ruby made me crazy, end of story. He made me so crazyâ€" Crazy in a way I couldn't escape from. Crazy in the kind of way that made me want to check and see if my nose was bleeding again. Crazy like someone on drugs, or much worseâ€"someone in love.

Ruby had shown me pleasure so far beyond what I remembered it being. I never got the joy of being a normal sixteen or so year old boy with raging hormones like most did. I never knew what it was like to "jack off" considering I had always been too sick to ever get an erection out of the blue. And of course I was fine with that growing up, it always seemed like it would be more of hassle than anything. Not to mention the only time I ever seemed to "come" was when I was asleep in a hospital bed, and how horrible those memories wereâ€"

I didn't know what I was thinking would happen when I decided that it was ok to wake Ruby up and let him love me, but I knew I certainly wasn't thinking about how much body fluids would spew. Not just my nose, but elsewhereâ€" in places I couldn't quite speak of yet. I was in shock, even now, an hour later flying in the air with Ruby innocently steering Salamence towards Goldenrod city.

Ruby had fondled me in a mind blowing way. His hands hot and his mouth tender against my skin. He had nuzzled me to cause such a glorious sensation through all of my insides I couldn't stand it. And as if to make things worseâ€" he placed that slender pale tongue against my slender pale arousal, and that had been where things went wrong.

I had jolted in panic, trying to dislodge myself from him before he was struck with what was comingâ€"me coming. He hadn't pulled away like I wanted him to, and my hand was too weak to pry him away from the innocent little snake that spat venom. Ruby had been hit, almost as hard as I had been. Thick white strands had shot up and slapped him in the face, barely missing his eyes and sticking to his cheeks like affectionate kisses. He had flinched only once, and then opened

his eyes to stare wildly at what had just happened.

Ruby cum-ridden and awestruck was perhaps the most horrible and beautiful thing I had ever seen. His hazy burgundy eyes had been lust covered, and his tight lips had parted withâ€”of all thingsâ€”enjoyment. I expected Ruby never to talk to me again after what I did all over his face, but he merely wiped it off and came to my rescueâ€”once againâ€”making me feel somehow better.

I bled all over him for a few minutes then, fighting a lolling dizziness that threatened to make me faint. Surprisingly my lungs had held up, but it was my mind that was going overboard and sinking.

And now this. Sapphire leaving to Goldenrod on her own. I needed time to think, to contemplate, to wonder when I would get the chance to make up for my previous actions. I needed to know when Ruby would want sex again. Because I wanted it. Again. Somehow despite the horror it caused me I wanted it very badly.

I was absolutely enthralled with the way Ruby had been able to push me over the edge like that, and to my sudden interest, I wanted to do the same for him. Whatever the cause or the result, I wanted to see Ruby's face as his arousal ran too high to get down. It was extremely weird of me, but I wanted to see itâ€”all of it. From the moment he took out that precious gem from under his pants to the last second of eruption. The white of his venom, his poison, his everythingâ€”I wanted it.

And he could tell.

He wanted it to.

My hands were woven around his stomach now while we charged through the air, Salamence flapping his massive wings with great effort. Of course he had insisted on steering the pokemon, I was in no condition to anyways; so I was behind him. It was nice to have a moment of recognition without him looking down at me, and I didn't have to explain what I was doing when I kissed the back of his neck carefully. This lust wouldn't end of course, but it could be postponed for now.

We had things to do before drowning in our sexuality again.

We had to stop Sapphire.

"She knows it's my birthday tomorrowâ€”" Ruby was muttering. "Oh Arceus, Wallyâ€”what are we going to do? My mother is already there! Sapphire is going to make sure she signs that contract."

"Don't worryâ€”we will think of something." I snuggled into him even closer. "If we get there in time maybe you can explain to the studio that you don't want toâ€”"

"And what if we don't?" Ruby growled. "Come on Salamence! Can't you go faster!"

Salamence grunted in response. He was trying his hardest, but a big oaf like him could never be as smooth and fast as Brendan's soaring Altaria. She actually had to keep pace with us.

"Ruby! Wally!" speaking of which, Brendan yelled to us now, getting our attention between the long silvery blue feathers of his pokemon's flapping wings.

"What?!" Ruby demanded, some of the previous distaste lingering in his voice. He was just upset and scared right now, I knew that, but I didn't like the way he took his anger out on us.

"Iâ€"I don't want to do this!" Brendan admitted. "Ruby, I can't play second best to you! I'm not a performer! I can't do it! I don't really want to live that life!"

We all blinked in surprise. Why now? Why would he have followed us all this way just to tell us he couldn't do it? Either way, I straightened up and watched him fly, his hair blowing brilliantly out behind his head. I glanced at Ruby. His hair flew in the same fashion, only better of course. But the similarities was too much. I shook my head at the familiarity in their facial expression, their strength, even now their voice and courage. They were both stubborn and determined and it left me wondering.

The world was smallâ€" so small that a performer like Ruby could end up in a tiny town like the one I lived in, only to meet his one true love like he did. And me, who was once so frail and weak and unable, to the person I was now.

"Brendan!" I yelled to him. "Why?!"

He smiled crookedly. "I guess I'm more like Ruby than I thought! Now let's go!"

"But if you don't want to!?" Ruby howled as the Altaria pushed on ahead. Heâ€"like meâ€"couldn't understand why he wanted to continue on with us without wanting that contract.

Brendan shot back again, beaming. "We have to stop that contract!"

Smiles broke across all our faces as did the city of Goldenrod over the horizon. Ruby looked sadly amused, and I was just happy to have the pleasure of sex put asideâ€"for the momentâ€"and Brendan looked like he really knew, more than anything he knew who he was. It was three against one now, and there was no way Sapphire could win.

So long as we got there on timeâ€"

â€".

"LET ME IN!" Ruby demanded to the security guard standing outside the Goldenrod studio, protecting his precious company like the company protected him. He refused to speak to us anymore, but rather held out a device of some sort. Its wiry ends flickered with electricity and no one was willing to get close enough to see what it would do.

The guard stood at attention, hand curled at his side, tempted to snag the portable radio and call for backup. I grit my teeth together. They knew exactly who Ruby was, but for some reason they wouldn't let him in. The only reason I could think of was that Ruby's mother and Sapphire were already in there signing contracts. They could have

paid these people off to keep us out. I shook my thoughts clear angrily. Ruby was nobody's propertyâ€”with the expectation of meâ€”and him not being free would ruin everything we ever wanted.

I gripped Ruby by the hand and pulled him back from the guard before he started throwing punches. There was a moment of hesitation before I had to yank him sternly to get his attention. I gripped Brendan by the shoulder and pulled him along too.

"There's got to be another entrance." I shook my head. "And even if we get in through the front door they won't let us know where Sapphire and your mother are."

Ruby was fuming, panic stricken and unable to answer me, Brendan however was listening intently. I went on.

"Brendan, you stay here and try and reason with the guard." I suggested. "Ruby and I will go look for another way inâ€”orâ€”we will break out way in."

Ruby nodded. This was the only plan we had so he had to go with it. Of course I had no real intentions of looking for another entrance. Salamence could take the roof off this place single handedly and there would be no reasoning with a massive dragon. They would have to let us in.

I pulled Ruby along, acting as if we were retreating, but gripping the blue topped pokeball around my waist and hitting the button. It swelled in my hand, prepared to leap into action. I cast Ruby a careful glance, plucking the thing from my belt and holding it up.

"We'll fight." I nodded to him. His eyes were so full of love in that moment it took my breath away. Not in the literal senseâ€”for onceâ€”I meant that in the way anyone else would. He was too perfect, especially when he put his faith in me.

With a swooping motion I slipped my hand up around his neck and pulled him down swiftly to kiss me. He didn't hesitate, but didn't react well either. I let him go too quickly, stepping back onto the heels of my feet and enjoying the short spasm in my heart. I took a deep breath.

"I love you Ruby."

"I love you too." He whispered as I released Salamence and sent a shiver up the guard's spine. The small crowd that had formed from off the city streets was growing larger, gasping at the sight of either their favorite television star kissing another boy, or my dragon. I couldn't be sure but it seemed suddenly everyone was awestruck. I took this as courage and hauled myself up on Salamence's shoulders.

Ruby pulled himself up behind meâ€”for onceâ€”letting HIS arms come around me, rather mine around his. He trusted me one hundred and ten percent, and I never felt a harsher swell of emotion. This was life or death for us. Would a contract be signed within the next four hours? Or could we convince the studio otherwise? I hated that we had come so close and Sapphire disappearing had ruined it for us, but I knew we had to do something. And worst comes to worst, we run and



never come back. I would follow Ruby to the edge of the earth, fugitive or not. He could be my renegade; I would love him just the same.

"Let's go!" I whacked Salamence in the back of the neck, sending all my bravery to him, mentally hoping the pokemon would feel the severity of such circumstances. He roared in response, but did not take to the skies like I wanted him to. He instead trudged forward; huge heavy feet crackling the most fragile pieces of sidewalk and making the audience back away in shock.

"Salamence!" I ordered. He'd never disobeyed my orders before, and yet even as I tried to direct him upwards he only squared off against the studio door. Brendan slipped out of his view in alarm, emerald eyes huge and leaving the faithful guard cornered in his war path. Salamence snarled, jaws gaping and spit flying towards the suit-dressed man with the taser.

He stood shaking in panic. Life or his job? Salamence drew closer, a blue flame threatening in the back of his throat.

He fled, just like that, leaving the door unguarded and open to our desire. Brendan cackled and bounced over to it. "Pokemon knows how it's done!" He fled into the building before us.

Well that was easier than I thought.

I shoved Salamence roughly after sliding off of him and then called him back with a short thank you. I suppose there was some good in making people soil their pants, especially in this particular moment. Ruby ran ahead of me, catching the door behind Brendan even before it could shut. I called my pokemon back and went after them, hooking the ball to my belt again, though secretly wishing he was big enough to fit in this building without being destructive.

Ruby tore his way to front desk where a pink haired lady sat in a very informal tshirt. She winced as if he had just slapped her.

"Where is Sapphire!" He demanded. She knew the name well of course. Everyone knew their names.

"That's the third door on the sixth floor." She cowered, having seen me enter with a pokeball in my hand. She obviously didn't miss the menace from outside a moment ago. Her shaky hands held a stack of papers out in front of her, as if they would help.

"Elevators this way!" Brendan slapped the button against the wall to illuminate it. The elevator doors sprung open instantly.

Ruby cast another glance at the girl behind the counter before gripping my wrist and hauling me to the door. Six flights of stairs would do wonders for someone with my kind of asthma, so I was glad when he allowed us to even get near a slow elevator.

Ruby paced on the inside, pushing the buttons and not allowing anyone on any other floors to enter with us. Brendan leaned casually against the side while I considered the typical thoughts about elevator sex and wondered how that could be enjoyable in the slightest. My brain was still scrambled of course, and Ruby's face had never been washed

with soap to cleanse it of my DNA. I had to shake the thoughts away. This was too vital.

"Fucking slow!" Ruby groaned a moment before the doors opened to reveal the sixth floor to us.

It was bland, no windows and no pictures on the walls, not a speck of nature or air anywhere to be seen. Businessmen loitered, talking with one another in low voices, casting glances our way but never trying to approach us. Ruby dragged me without a passing glance, frantic to reach the doors on the other end that would make or break us. My heart was racing, and I gasped when a tall, very lean, almost homeless looking "in comparison" boy. He had raven hair and said nothing, even after my thrown apology for knocking a Dixie cup of coffee from his hand was given.

Brendan was ahead of us, throwing open ever office and closet door trying to find our group. It took indeed three doors before we all collided at the sudden stop. Brendan vanished beyond us, and a second later we were rounding the corner as well.

"Stop!" Ruby begged, releasing my hand and barging past a female assistant that was on her way out. Her strange yellow hair made us stop and stare, but she barely noticed as she went, fearful for her life as Ruby snarled.

The office room was large compared to some other I had seen, with shade covered windows and more than enough tables with papers papers all over the place. There were open file cabinets, folders, and even money lying about. And it was all guarded by one handsome golden brunette with forest green eyes and small glasses to cover them. He sat with his hands folded, a surprised expression across his face though still looking towards none other than Ruby's mother and Sapphire herself.

"Ruby!" The handsome brunette smiled a delicate smile, his perfectly straight and white teeth glinting in the lowlight. He adjusted the glasses on his nose and looked up. "How kind of you to join us. I'm Green, and I will be managing your new managers."

"No!" Ruby huffed, pushing forward to the desk, staring the man down. He didn't look much like a manager, in his casual plum sweater and his messy hair. He looked too relaxed compared to the suited men outside in the hallway. I wasn't sure whether to be reassured by this or more distraught.

"Ruby, I have signed already." His mother spoke so quietly I was sure we hadn't heard correctly.

"No!" I shook my head. "No!"

Ruby turned then, eyes panic stricken. If I thought he looked scared before he truly looked horrified now. And my heart broke for him.

All that time! all that effort and planning and blood sweat and tears put into trying to stop this and we are a barely a day late. Not even late, Sapphire was just early. In a matter of hours Ruby Stone would have been turning eighteen, he would have been his own man, no longer a boy strapped down by his mother. He would take all

his priorities and turn them over to him and him alone. Me if I was lucky. But he would no longer be living for anyone else. He would be independent and strong and I appreciated that.

I wanted thatâ€¦

Tears sprung from my eyes first, typical for me in high emotion situations. I was floundering, trying to understand how in the world we would be together. Fugativesâ€¦ I could never see my Auntie that way. We would always be running. We would have to move and despite the fact that I would follow Ruby to the end of the earthâ€¦ I still hated the very idea. Hoenn was our life, Verdanturfâ€¦ though I once wanted to escape from itâ€¦ would always be my home.

I sniveled, trying my hardest to hold on for his sake, but also not wanting to appear completely ruined. My throat was tight, my lungs clouded with bad air, and my head spinning. Things didn't have to be like thisâ€¦ things were absolutely fine the way they were without all this.

Ruby looked from eye to eye, staring each and every one of us down while trying to hold himself together. Brendan seemed to encourage him with a determined blink, his mother and Sapphire merely looked away. Sapphire was ashamed of herself, that was obvious, but she had too much an ego to admit it. Ruby's mother on the other hand, probably just didn't want to look at her son at all.

And then his burgundy eyes fell on me, looking deeper than just the surface. Ruby could see every ounce of love and raw emotion there. He was dwelling in my tears, knowing that this was it, this was where we broke. We would leave and never come back just to save Ruby from performing and being miserable. I swallowed hard looking at him, shoulders slumped and shaking with grief. All thatâ€¦ all that for nothing.

"Erâ€¦.hemâ€¦" The brunette spoke up, though he looked to be suffering from his own emotions. He chewed the inside of his cheek to distract himself. "Ruby please, weâ€¦ we need your cooperation."

Ruby turned then, slowly, heartbroken and fighting tears of his own. He sniffed hard, all the fight turning into hate in his eyes. There was suddenly no desire to move on there. There was nothing but pain. I could see every raw moment of Ruby's childhood in his eyes. I could see all the love and compassion he lacked, the way he grew up alone and never doing anything right. I broke for him, crying and losing control while his face went red with anger.

"NO I WILL NOT COOPERATE!" Ruby slammed his fist down on the desk, making Brendan jump. "I WON'T DO IT! I WON'T WORK FOR YOU!"

"Ruby!" His mother hissed. "Stop it this instance!"

Rage filled tears were falling. "SHUT UP!" Ruby snarled at his mother. "I HATE YOU! I HATE YOU SO MUCH FOR WHAT YOU'VE DONE TO ME!"

Green sat quietly, unaware of the tension behind all of this. I was nearly sobbing now, my heart pounding and my lungs chugging painfully. I hated seeing Ruby like this. I wanted to throw my arms around him and hold him back from all this hate. It wasn't worth it.

He wasn't worth their time. They didn't deserve his anger.

"I hate you!" Ruby repeated in a much softer, deadlier tone. Now that he got his mother's attention he let her soak in it. What kind of mother could sit there and look her son in the eyes while he said he hated them? I could only imagine the pain it would cause anyone in my family if I said something so severe to them.

Brendan looked mortified at the thought, Green looked dumbstruck, and as if to make things worse, that lean raven from out in the hall waltzed in, his crimson eyes darting back and forth nervously. An awkward tension grew in the air. Cut it with a knife why don't you?

We all stared at each other, unsure of what to do and finding it very hard to speak. Sapphire was the quietest, refusing to allow herself any words that would crack her. She was hanging on by a thread, her guilt weighing her down and her pride keeping her barely afloat.

"Miss Stone!" Green, the manager of all managers asked in a whisper. "I need to see Ruby's birth certificate please!"

He didn't look to be on Ruby's mother's side, he actually looked quite miserable to have to do this at all. But as a business man I could see it was in his work not his heart. He felt he had to do this for his job, which was that city mentality I had loathed from day one. Had someone like Green come from a town like Verdanturf, he would see justice and understanding in a new light. He wouldn't stop and be guilty in the face of someone he was signing up for torture; he would stop and fix the problem.

The sound of crinkled papers came as Ruby's mother inclined forward, her pale eyes dotted with tears from Ruby's comment, but unfolding a birth certificate from her purse anyways. She shifted forward and laid the creased paper down on the table before us.

Ruby, my baby, turned to me then, unable to look any longer at what was happening to him. He shook like I did, with sick surrender, and buried his face into my shoulder. I wrapped my arms around him, staring past at the desk in which Green was looking over the paper.

"You're eighteen tomorrow." He whispered, hand quivering around the paper. It was not a statement directed at anyone, but so softly spoke to himself. It was as if he could suddenly understand what the big deal was. A contract signed just before his free will, something he had no control over now. His mother was the devil herself, and even Green seemed to see it. Sapphire looked sick in her spot in a black chair.

"Coffee!" the raven, the one who dressed in the same casual clothes as Green spoke. His voice sounded strange even beyond Ruby's whimpering.

Coffee? Excuse me? Coffee? I was internally shaking my head.

"No! no Red. No coffee." Green said softly, turning to grab something from a stack of papers behind him. The raven stepped forward with his Dixie cup anyways.

"No Red." He repeated, bringing the document that signed Ruby's life away. He set it on the table beside his birth certificate to compare information. No one spoke to each other during this process. It was painful, as was holding a crumbling Ruby in my arms and wishing I could make things better. I didn't try to kiss him, or tell him it would be ok, I just simple held him there. My small arms wrapped as tightly as they could be around his body. He buried his face in my hair, approving of this rare moment in which I was suddenly more dominant than he was.

"Coffee!" Red spoke again, voice as monotone as they get. Was that the only word he knew? I was suddenly happy I knocked his precious coffee out of his hand in the hallway. My eyes narrowed, releasing another tear to slip from the corner.

"Red!" The brunette shouted, looking up at his coffee delivery boy as if they were communicating in another language. He shook his head, a hidden emotion crossing his forest eyes. "No!"

Red's eyes narrowed ever so slightly, and he stepped forward in a slow motion. A very faint spark of anger flashed before his face, and in the same instant coffee was sprayed everywhere.

Black as night oily coffee! soiling the paperwork that signed Ruby's life away. It was like some strong smelling massacre of paper sopping wet and stained, ink dripping and spreading like wildfire. Even the precious birth certificate, the only proof we had that Ruby's birthday was tomorrow, was ruined, precisely struck with the liquid as if it was on fire and needed to be put out.

Sapphire gasped in horror, jolting forward to try and salvage what little left of her dream she could. Her small hands fumbled in the mess while Green just stared in amazement at his assistant.

"What did you that for!?" Ruby's mother demanded.

It was then that we realized Sapphire was in hysterics. All hopes and dreams about everything she could and ever would be, were gone. Throwing coffee on the one thing holder her on this earth was like taking a knife to her heart. She had fought in her own way for so long, trying to pursue her dreams when in reality all she did was destroy others. Her future was gone and you could see it in her eyes. All that guilt and anger and frustration was piled up and flooding out in the form of tears. She was done.

A teenage girl could only take so much before breaking. And it just so happened that in this situation, her breaking point was that damn cup of black coffee. It was the straw that broke the Camerupts back.

Ruby turned then, prying himself from me and facing the crowded room. Brendan was out of place as usual, but looking almost amused. He twiddled his thumbs in impatience.

"I DEMAND THIS FIXED!" Ruby's mother howled, pointing a long nail at Red, the coffee boy. "NOW! I WANT THAT THING FIRED!"

Green was shaking his head sadly. "I'm sorry!" He raised his hands. "I can't do anything without a birth certificate."

"WELL LET IT DRY OFF!" She demanded, reaching forward to grab the sopping mess in front of her. Ruby huffed in amazement as it ripped under her claw. She cursed madly.

"No!" Sapphire pulled her legs up into the chair with her, holding them against her chest.

"What?" Brendan cocked his head to the side.

"No." She repeated. "Miss Stone! No." her ocean eyes were rimmed in red. "I changed my mind."

The whole room stared in amazement.

"I'm serious." She nodded, tears pouring for the last time. "My career is over." In one jerky movement she dislodged herself from the chair, admitting defeat and storming off, out of the office, out of the hallway, out of the building and out of our lives. Ruby's mother snapped after her, hot on her partner's heels, but defeated none the less.

Me?

I looked up to see the handsome forest eyed manager and the lean crimson eyed raven gratefully. Maybe people from the city—they couldn't be from the city.

"Thank you." I bit my lip. The raven cracked a smile.

Ruby, despite it all, laughed at the sight. "Thank you! You're right." He hiccupped.

Red nodded once and looked down at his manager lovingly. The brunette smiled back, rolling his eyes. "You're fired."

The coffee boy shrugged, lithely moving away and out the door to refill that pathetic Dixie cup to all its use.

I looked at Ruby. His face reflected love.

"You're free." I bit my lip, slithering a hand into his.

He shook his head. "No." He corrected.

"We're free."

### 13. Epilogue

~Wally~

Ruby and I spent his birthday flying six hours home to Johto, wrapped in each other's arms like we should have been the first time we flew. It was quiet and careful, very opposite in comparison to my flight with Cynthia. I kept trying to talk to Ruby and tell him I was sorry that I couldn't get him anything real for his birthday, but he wasn't having it. Ruby was thrilled to be free, now that the shock and disbelief of Sapphire really truly giving up set in, he didn't need anything more.

Well except maybe one thing.

It was two days since the plane flight home, and me and Ruby were determined this time. Under the hot July sun we flew from a hotel room in Mauville to that perfect little lake miles from the city and into the clean mountain air. This was the place I realized I loved Ruby at, the place I got my first nosebleed because of his shirtless body, the first time he ever made me fly or made me surf. This lake was a first for everything between us, and sex was not going to be the exception.

However, I refused to go into it confused again, so before hand, while we lay half clothed on the blanket covering the tall grass, I asked him again how two men could have sex. And he told me, with a embarrassed hesitation, that one of us had to be willing to "spread our cheeks" and even before I had time to contemplate that, I knew it was going to be me.

But the thought alone, of Ruby'sâ€¦ going into me from there. I wouldn't lie, I told him I was scared and that I knew it would hurt. Of course he said we would take it slowâ€¦and I believed him this timeâ€¦but I was still afraid. It took a lot of persuading this time, and in the end it was Ruby singing to me that won me over.

"I'll sing to you the whole timeâ€¦ as long as I can." Ruby had whispered in my ear, making a promise he knew would push me over the edge. I agreed, my heart aflame with a sudden intensity that couldn't be put out.

Here at the lake I could truly breathe, which were our intentions of doing it here in the first place, and I appreciated the air as it wafted in and wafted out of my lungs. It made things much easier on me physically, plus the idle sensations lasted longer when I didn't have to focus on something that should be so natural.

Ruby had taken his sweet time kissing me, all over and especially my stomach as it was his favorite place. He had used his hands in such a way that I felt weightless under him. Even clothed the beginning of sex had been remarkable. And I could breatheâ€¦

I took long, fluid breathes that resembled the way my Salamence's wings flapped through the air. It was here that I realized ever since I met Ruby things had gotten better for me. Despite the chronic nose bleeds and the random passing out, my breathing as a whole had gone from a lulling numbness to a sporadic once-in-a-blue-moon outburst in which he was always there to catch me. I had been telling myself for so long that Ruby was bad for my health physically, only to come to terms with the facts that he was actually the best medication I had ever received.

Ruby had tantalized me for a long time, letting me fester in my own arousal, talking to me between moments of lust and love and asking me questions about how I felt and why I was so much better off here. I told him it was the city air that made things worse, and that I felt like I was dying in a good way. He whispered something in my ear after that, but I couldn't recall what it was.

We were naked together for a long time too, letting the sun bake our bodies, tanning him and burning me while mid day kept us safe from

unwanted visitors. Surprisingly it was not bad, when normally you would think sex is a nightly activity, I enjoyed it most during the day, when I could truly see the color of Ruby's burgundy eyes and his almond skin.

Speaking of skin, he found every freckle on me, even the one placed precisely in the small of my back, slightly to the left and not quite big enough to be noticeable without looking for it. He noticed this one after at least an hour of introducing me to the wonderful world of fingering. One finger, two fingers, I wasn't sure how many he had used at some point, all I knew was that it had been better than I expected it to be.

He ravished me into wetness, using a combination of his pre-juices as well as my own to slick the entrance enough to allow him in. Of course this was only the start though, and it didn't last long. It was gave me a teasing taste before the actual prize.

Unfortunately for me, I had to come before he could make it in again.

But when he didâ€¦

He had first left me under him on my back, watching my expression and listening to the way I squeaked and moaned at the first few thrusts, but then he pulled up and left me on my side. He hitched one of my legs up and knelt into me, stretching the tight walls in such a way that I actually bled. No, not my nose. He actually made me bleed from my backside.

Surprisingly I didn't have a nosebleed until he coaxed me into kneeling forward on my own. At first I was crouched with my knees and my hands tight, supporting my back while he planted kissed between my shoulder blades, but by the time he actually got around to gripping my hips and moving himself in and out, I lost it.

My shoulders had slumped forward and my head fell flat against the blanket while blood poured from my nose all over the place. Ruby was gentleman enough to ask me if I was ok, but I merely replied with "DON'T STOP" in the most begging way I could muster. He picked up speed after that, stretching and pushing until I was hiccupping and gasping, yelling about how he said he would sing to me.

He couldn't sing though, not while he was grunting and huffing and moaning my name, but he tried none the less. He hissed out words of songs I had heard before, and some I never even knew existed. None of it made sense, and some of it even seemed to be in another language, leading me to believe he had musical turrets. I appreciated every lousy lyric he could come up with, and every grunt and gurgle shared between us.

There was one thing I asked Ruby to do for me before we had sex, and I was surprised at this point that he actually remembered. I asked him to let me see it, to let me reach out and touch the precious skin around his large erection as it convulsed for the first time with me. He agreed with honor and in the act of coming hard he allowed my single right hand to feel it ripple. Bloody and sweaty and sun burnt I had fallen in love all over again.

We wound up in the lake after Ruby was finished with me, cleaning



each other off with gentle hands and murky water. Ruby rubbed between my legs gently, ignoring the invisible bruising that would show up within the next few hours and making me feel more loved than ever before. I breathed easily against him, brushing his wet hair back and kissing at his neck until the sun started to set. He carried me and my bedraggled self back up the shore to the blanket and wrapped towels around me until I was warm again.

We stayed like that together for a long time. Not speaking, but remembering everything we had ever been through together. I thought back to the first time I heard him sing, and how he saved my life without even hesitating. I thought about the way we battled, and how happy I was to get to travel with him. I thought about retrieving Midnight's egg and hatching it and then losing her at such a young age, and how till this day I couldn't believe Ruby forgave me for what happened. I thought about Sapphire and how much she must have suffered through it all like we did, and Brendan with his poverty problems.

I thought about how much love Ruby had missed out on growing up, and how from here on out we had nothing but love to give to each other. He was eighteen and free, I was getting stronger every single day, and we were absolutely happy.

"Rubyâ€¦" I finally spoke, which was a soft rasp after so much moaning and screaming before.

"Hmm?" He asked, his chin resting atop my head, hand twisting with mine lovingly as the first dots of star began to flicker in the purple sky.

"I love you." I whispered.

He chuckled softly, leaning down to kiss my cheek. "Wallyâ€¦I love you too."

His face proceeded to dance across my neck, sweeping with fluttering eyelashes and warm breaths. "Don't you know?" He asked me. "You're all I ever wanted."

I closed my eyes and smiled. "Liar."

"No really." he hummed. "Wallyâ€¦ you're all I want."

"I'm yours." I corrected.

"Wanted then." He held me tenderly. "You're all I ever wantedâ€¦"

End  
file.